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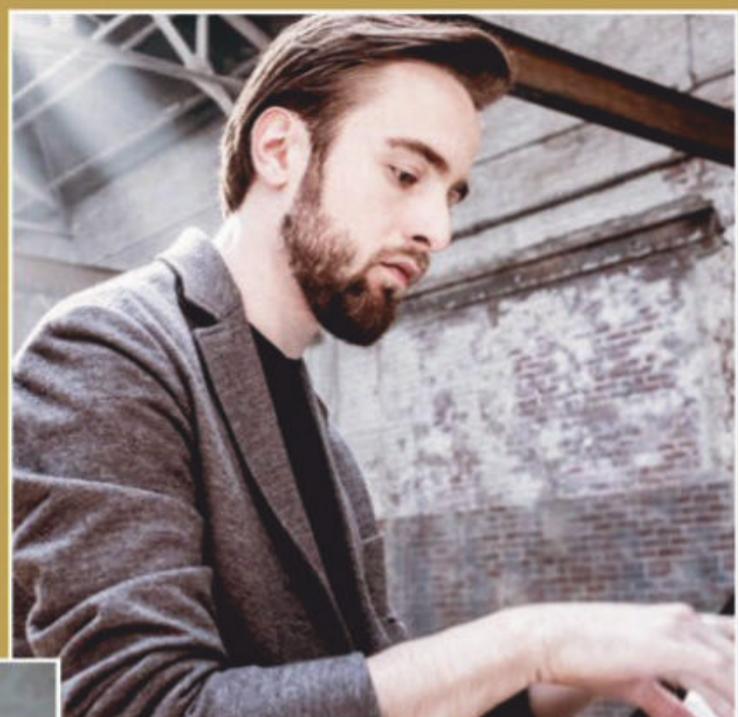
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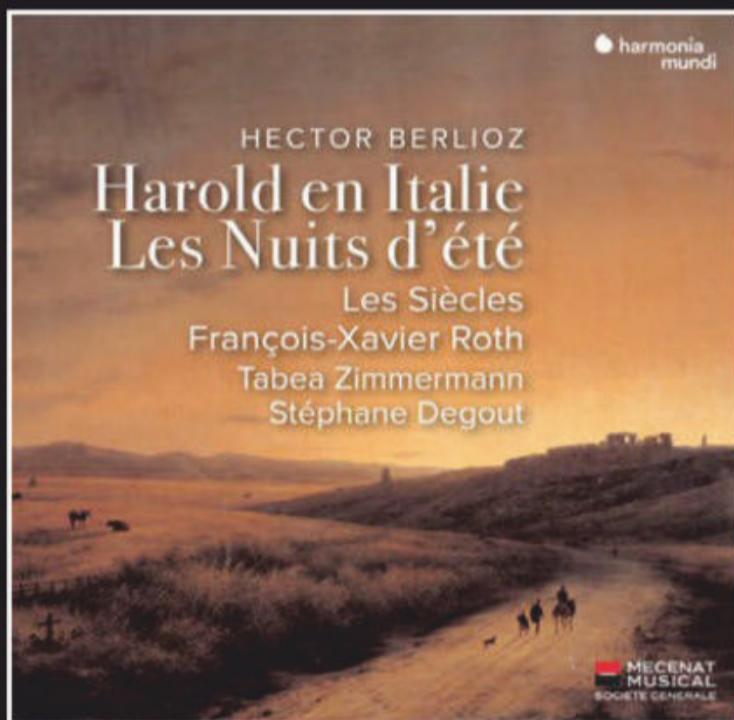
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Jean-François Heisser
Marie-Josèphe Jude
Piano Pleyel vis-à-vis, 1928



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A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

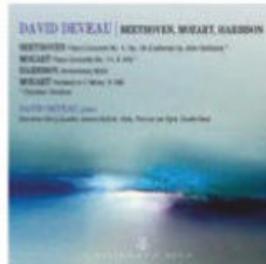
Beethoven · Harbison · Mozart

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 4, Op 58^a

Harbison Anniversary Waltz Mozart Piano Concerto No 14, K449^b. Fantasia, K396

David Deveau *pfa*^b Borromeo Quartet;

^aJessica Bodner *va* ^{ab}Thomas van Dyck *db*
Steinway & Sons  STNS30099 (68' • DDD)



If you were hearing Mozart's K449 and Beethoven's Fourth Concerto for the first time via these reductions for string quintet or sextet and piano, you wouldn't suspect that anything's amiss. This is partly due to the intense and enlivening contributions of the Borromeo Quartet (and colleagues), matched note by note and point by point by David Deveau's mindful, stylish virtuosity.

The ensemble sustains the Beethoven first-movement ritornello's broad basic tempo with a degree of note-to-note inflection that more than compensates for the particular tonal qualities of Beethoven's instrumentation (the second subject's plaintive solo oboe, for example). The finale's rapid exchanges between piano and strings not only benefit from the elevated chamber interplay resulting from reduced forces but also allow for subtle tempo fluctuations, and for the scurrying bass lines to emerge with refreshing clarity. Listeners will notice how the strings' fierce projection and focus of the slow movement's declarative unison *tutti*s provide a foil to Deveau's plaintive reserve.

Nor are the Mozart readings any less intelligently detailed. In the finale, the easy-going repartee between piano and strings yields bracing contrapuntal cogency, while the slow movement's operatic melody lines and relatively modest accompanimental figurations emerge with shapely and meaningful interaction. Composer John Harbison's cadenzas for the Mozart are thoroughly idiomatic but not so imaginatively wrought as his Beethoven cadenzas,

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

David Deveau

The Boston-based pianist discusses the chamber versions of Mozart and Beethoven concertos

Is anything lost in playing Mozart and Beethoven concertos with chamber forces?

Because these arrangements are for small string ensembles (to which I added bass), we lose the colour of the wind instruments, and the power of the brass and timpani.

But presumably there are gains, too?

Of course! The gains are clearly a greater clarity of the interplay between solo and tutti parts, and an immediacy and intimacy that benefits both concertos. All Mozart's concertos up to and including this one, K449, can be done with strings alone because the wind parts are mostly just doubling. Mozart would undoubtedly have played these works in home settings with a string quartet or quintet. The Beethoven was arranged by either the composer himself, or possibly an assistant, for string quintet and piano for a private, pre-premiere performance in 1807.



So is that why you play Beethoven's Fourth rather than one of the earlier concertos?

Yes, this is the only one of the five that exists in a chamber version. I may someday try my hand at arranging one or two of the earlier concertos for a similar-sized ensemble.

Why do you play John Harbison's cadenzas?

John is a long-term friend and colleague who has composed wonderful cadenzas for other Mozart concertos (I've played those for K491 and K482). So I asked him if he'd consider composing cadenzas for the Beethoven. He complied, with splendid results. And how different from Beethoven's own they are! There are many recordings of these two concertos so I chose to do something a bit different.

which admittedly venture on occasion into early Brahms/Fauré harmonic territory. Late Fauré, however, appears to be the jumping-off point for Harbison's gorgeous little *Anniversary Waltz*, an impression enhanced by Deveau's sensitive performance. I also like his ripe and vocally informed Mozart K396 Fantasia, featuring bass lines that resonate and soar to the heavens. Excellent sound and annotations add to this disc's appeal.

Jed Distler

Brahms · Carter

Brahms Clarinet Quintet, Op 115^a Carter Clarinet

Quintet^a. Esprit rude/esprit doux^b

Mark Lieb *cl/b* Anna Urrey *f/a* Phoenix Ensemble

Navona  NV6193 (60' • DDD)



This is a disc of two halves. It opens with the greatest clarinet quintet ever penned and then abruptly switches gear – leaping forwards 90-odd years – with Elliott Carter's *Esprit rude/esprit doux* (1985). This bracing duo for flute and clarinet is the pivot on which the Phoenix Ensemble's programme turns, the concentration of its writing in marked contrast to Brahms's autumnal, expansive flow as much as the succession of late vignettes that comprise the American's own, smaller-scale Clarinet Quintet (2007).

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Public eloquence: the Nashville Symphony Chorus capture the colours and textures of John Harbison's Requiem

The community of spirit between the two quintets is all the more remarkable for the difference in manner and scale: all five of Carter's movements can fit within the duration of Brahms's opening *Allegro*. Where they differ is in Carter's whimsicality; his Quintet – also a late work – a wry antithesis to Brahms's? The Phoenix may not quite match the virtuosity of the performers on Bridge's *Gramophone* Award-nominated disc in 2010 but do find the humour.

Among other oddities here are the different playing styles that the Phoenix Ensemble adopt. I recall the Philadelphia Orchestra's 1982 visit to the BBC Proms where, having rendered a virtuoso account of movements from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, they reverted to a performing style more like a 1940s film soundtrack for Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. The difference here is not quite as marked, for sure, but compared to BIS's star-studded account led by Martin Fröst, the Phoenix sound a touch outmoded, for all the fluency of their playing. Navona's sound does not help here, the performance lacking the marvellous clarity of the Swedish label.

Guy Rickards

Brahms – selected comparison:

Fröst et al (7/14) (BIS) BIS2063

Carter Clarinet Quintet – comparative version:

Neidich, Juilliard Qt (BRID) BRIDGE9314

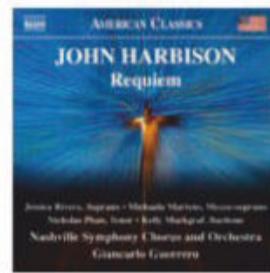
Harbison

Requiem

Jessica Rivera sop Michaela Martens mez Nicholas Phan ten Kelly Markgraf bar Nashville Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Giancarlo Guerrero

Naxos American Classics M 8 559841
(55' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at Laura Turner Concert Hall,
Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Nashville,
May 12 & 13, 2017



John Harbison's deeply felt, near hour-long Requiem was finished in 2002 after a long gestation period beginning almost two decades earlier, when the composer had spontaneously composed what would eventually become the opening Introit after the death of a friend.

Ten years later the Internationale Bachakademie Stuttgart invited Harbison to contribute a movement to a collective *Requiem of Reconciliation* commemorating the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. He finished his Requiem in 2002 after the Boston Symphony commissioned him a week before the 9/11 attacks. Not surprisingly, given the stretch of time over which it was composed and the nature of the triggering events, Harbison's Requiem is less about personal intimacy and grief and more about public eloquence and mourning.

In Harbison's scheme the soloists play their usual major roles but the ceremonial nature of the work results in the orchestra becoming a member of the congregation along with the chorus itself. The Requiem winds down reflectively, with four solo strings adding poignancy to a 'Lux aeterna' haunted by discord and the sadness of its

light; the concluding 'In paradisum' has an uneasy spiritual core that is not entirely resolved.

Among the soloists, Jessica Rivera and Kelly Markgraf stand out, with Nicholas Phan contributing moments of searing intensity. The choral and orchestral forces are magnificent throughout and Giancarlo Guerrero keeps them moving and fully committed.

The recording, made during performances in May 2017 at Schermerhorn Symphony Center, has the size and space it needs to capture the colours and textures of Harbison's rich orchestration and the impact of his powerful vision. **Laurence Vittes**

Schmidt

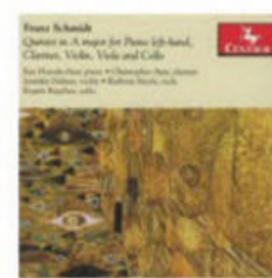
Quintet for Piano Left-Hand,

Clarinet, Violin, Viola and Cello

Christopher Ayer cl Jennifer Dalmas vn Kathryn

Steely va Evgeni Raychev vc Kae Hosoda-Ayer pf

Centaur F CRC3472 (69' • DDD)



Franz Schmidt
Quintet in A major for Piano left-hand,
Clarinet, Violin, Viola and Cello
An Händel-like piece in chamber-like idiom
Christopher Ayer cl Jennifer Dalmas vn
Kathryn Steely va Evgeni Raychev vc
Kae Hosoda-Ayer pf

Centaur F CRC3472 (69' • DDD)

Here is something surprising and welcome: the first recording of Franz Schmidt's Quintet in A for piano left-hand, clarinet, violin, viola and cello as conceived by the Austrian composer, according to the booklet notes by Jamie Weaver. Unlike other recordings, this new one features a pianist, Kae Hosoda-Ayer, who 'remains faithful to Schmidt's original intentions, playing every note with the left hand'.

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It's a lot of notes, not just for the pianist, with a playing time just short of 70 minutes. But the experience of hearing the five movements of Schmidt's rapturous and novel creation in one sitting is illuminating. The score reveals the stylistic range of the composer's art, which embraces Viennese Romantic and Hungarian sources along with inventive approaches to form and instrumentation. The presence of the clarinet doesn't signify a 'clarinet quintet' à la Mozart or Brahms. Instead, the instrument is used as a team player, providing alternative colours and a sense of nostalgia for better times.

Schmidt (1874-1939) wrote the score in the final months of his life for the pianist Paul Wittgenstein, whose right arm had been amputated during the First World War. Like the numerous eminent composers who created works for the pianist, Schmidt wrote challenging material that often gives the impression of a two-armed pianist in action. The second-movement Intermezzo is for piano alone, and is occasionally extracted for recital purposes.

Every movement seizes the ears, especially when Schmidt's soaring lyricism and harmonic quirkiness appear to know no bounds. Given that the composer was gravely ill while writing the piece, it may be natural that tinges of darkness make sporadic appearances. But the music is mostly a feast of glowing ideas, including a variations finale that uses a theme by Schmidt's teacher, Josef Labor, who had been the first composer Wittgenstein commissioned for a left-hand work.

Hosoda-Ayer's mastery of the piano part is so thorough that her artistry whets the appetite for performances of two-handed repertoire. Her colleagues are equally sensitive to Schmidt's tender and fervent demands. By the end, you will hardly notice that 70 minutes have slipped by. **Donald Rosenberg**

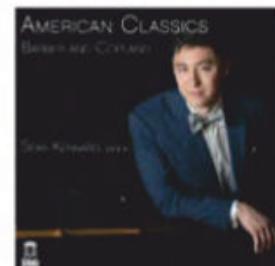
American Classics'

Barber Piano Sonata, Op 26. Ballade, Op 46. Excursions, Op 20 **Copland** Piano Variations.

Four Piano Blues

Sean Kennard pf

Delos Ⓜ DE3554 (55' • DDD)



Sean Kennard's assertive plunge into the Barber Sonata's exposition sets the

tone for the pianist's excellent grasp of the opening movement's forceful lyricism. His fingers are sufficiently supple to handle the Scherzo's playfully intricate patterns, although his phrase tapering slightly dissipates the rhythmic sparkle and airborne lightness one hears from pianists such as Earl Wild (Ivory) and Joel Fan (Reference Recordings). Kennard builds the third-movement Passacaglia from the bottom up in a long, steady and admirably sustained arc, albeit without the dynamic tension of Horowitz's classic reading or the gravitas of John Browning's second recorded version. He takes the fugal finale at a precipitous clip to the point where the accented notes and syncopations lose some of their stinging impact, and even rush ahead at times.

The same can be said for the last of Barber's four *Excursions*, where the repeated notes fly by with little consequence. The blues movement stiffly ambles in Kennard's hands, while the *Allegretto* proves loud and heavy in contrast to Israel Margalit's superior legato control and fluidity (Warner). On the other hand, Kennard truly internalises the harmonic richness and narrative sweep of Barber's Ballade, channelling his considerable technique towards musical ends. His use of the pedal proves especially adroit and ear-catching, notably in the winding down of the big climax (2'20") right before the main theme returns.

Kennard brings out the languid and rhapsodic qualities in the first three of Copland's *Four Piano Blues* well (I prefer Lara Downes's more sensual and dynamically contrasted interpretations – Arkadia), along with an appropriately lean and dry approach to the final piece's jazzy off-beat phrases. A dry and percussive touch befits the spiky sound world of Copland's Variations, yet it needn't be so unvaried and monotonous as Kennard makes it out to be. By contrast, Gilbert Kalish's Nonesuch recording presents Copland's austere aesthetic with a higher level of pianistic character and timbral variety. As you've probably gathered, the undeniably gifted Kennard faces tough catalogue competition. **Jed Distler**

'Boundless'

Frank Sonata Andina No 1 **Hu Pulse**
Lasser Piano Sonata, 'Les hiboux blancs'
Minju Choi pf
Navona Ⓜ NV6192 (63' • DDD)



Minju Choi is a Korean-American pianist who has made a speciality of new American music in her recitals, so it is appropriate that for her debut solo disc she has recorded three new works, the oldest being Philip Lasser's Sonata *Les hiboux blancs* ('The White Owls', 1996, rev 2001). Lasser (b1963) has commented that the White Owls 'play an important role in the piece' though declines to say what. The sonata-form opening movement, meditative central span and concluding toccata are terrifically well realised by Choi.

Gabriela Lena Frank (b1972) was born in California but is of mixed Peruvian, Chinese and Lithuanian Jewish origin and, as so often in her music, it is her Peruvian heritage that is evoked in her *Sonata Andina* No 1 (2000; a second dates from 2013). This is reflected not just in the movement titles – *Allegro Aymara*, *Himno Inca*, *Adagio Illariy* and *Finale Saqsampillo* – but in the evocations of Andean instruments, especially in *Himno Inca* with its percussive effects and handclaps, or the finale's vivid resonances of Ginastera. It is the most characterful work in the programme and Choi plays it superbly.

Ching-chu Hu (b1969) also has Asian-American heritage – from China, rather than Korea – and reflects traditional aspects from his homeland in the mirror of his Western-acquired technique. *Pulse* (2015 – there is no connection to Cowell's percussion quartet) was commissioned by Minju Choi and is a four-part paean to love, not entirely straightforward, as some of the movement titles reveal: 'Anxious', 'Anticipation', 'Dream' and 'Adrenaline'. The emotional progression is nicely achieved, the suite's idiom seeming as much a commentary on Western Classical love music as the thing itself. Nice.

Guy Rickards

'Brass Roots'

R Brown Concertino for harp & brass quintet^a
Campo Madrigals Kraft Nonet^b W Schmidt
Concertino for piano & brass quintet^c
^cSharon Davis pf^aStanley Chaloupka hp
^bLos Angeles Percussion Ensemble;
Los Angeles Brass Quintet
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Recorded 1967/74. From Ⓚ S602 (Brown), S802

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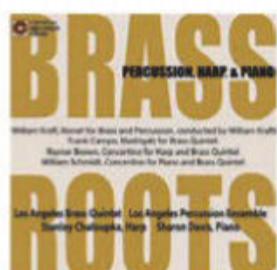
This recording was made possible through the generous support of **The Davee Foundation**.

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The Telegraph Quartet offer persuasive advocacy of music by Britten, Kirchner and Webern



This is an engaging, albeit rather short programme of historical recordings from 1967 and 1974. The largest work by far is William Kraft's *Nonet* (1958), an invigorating suite in six movements for five brass and four percussionists. Kraft (b1923) was by trade an orchestral percussionist – with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, no less – and composed a good number of works for or involving his own set of instruments, including several pieces in a series of 15 *Encounters*, plus concertos and other works. The *Nonet*'s opening *Presto* contains a substantial central episode for unaccompanied percussion that gathers up the brass as it accelerates towards the reprise of its opening fanfare. The remaining five movements integrate the two groups in an involving sequence of dramatic *andantes* and varied scherzos.

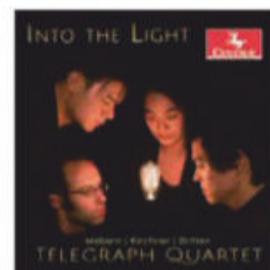
Frank Campo's discography is nothing like so extensive. Music for wind instruments figures prominently and the three *Madrigals* for brass quintet were written for the Los Angeles Brass Quintet. They are a product of their time (the late 1960s; they were published in 1971 and recorded three years later), Campo (b1927) treating the 16th-century madrigal form (more by association than in any strict way) fairly severely. I wonder what Monteverdi would have made of them, particularly the

breathing noises in the concluding 'Aria perduta'! The two brief concertinos, for harp by Rayner Brown (1912-99) and piano by William Schmidt (1926-2009), provide pleasant textural contrast though are musically less complex; Schmidt's is the more fun of the two. The sound has been remastered very well by Sonny Ausman.

Guy Rickards

‘Into the Light’

Britten Three Divertimenti Kirchner String Quartet No 1 Webern Five Movements, Op 5
Telegraph Quartet
Centaur © CRC3651 (40' • DDD)



Despite being rather imaginatively programmed and very strongly played, this disc is something of a missed opportunity. The album title refers to the Telegraph Quartet's unreservedly laudable mission to bring unfamiliar works out of the shadows, but that hardly applies to Webern's *Fünf Sätze* (1909), a well-enough-known concert item recorded dozens of times, or Britten's early *Three Divertimenti* (1933, rev 1936), which has also been well recorded, as a glance at Presto Classical's database will confirm. Even the most unfamiliar piece, the First Quartet (1949) by Leon Kirchner – born in the year Webern composed Op 5 – has three rival recordings available.

The 40'15" playing time is ungenerous, too. Were there a specific connection linking the three works that might be justified, but there is none beyond the questionable perception that they need special advocacy, which is true only for Kirchner's Quartet. Indeed, this is true for all four of Kirchner's quartets; another of these would have been welcome. Or what about a really unfamiliar piece, one of Robert Starer's, for example? (The Third of 1996 would have fitted nicely in terms of duration and fitted the brief.) The yawning space after the *Divertimenti* is aching to be filled since, coming after Kirchner's bold fusion of Bartók with Schoenberg and Webern's crystalline masterpiece, Britten's charming miniatures do not cumulatively make for a wholly satisfying finale.

This is a shame because, as I stated at the start, the playing itself is really very good. The Telegraph Quartet's accounts are certainly competitive – easily a match for the Orion Quartet in the Kirchner – and if their Britten is not as characterful as the Belcea's or Endellion's, it is still persuasive. Much the same applies to the Webern, a far more fiercely contested area. Centaur's sound is close but very fine. **Guy Rickards**

Britten – selected comparisons:

Belcea Qt (7/05) (EMI/WARN) 557968-2

Endellion Qt (12/13) (WARN) 2564 64200-8

Kirchner – selected comparison:

Orion Qt (ALBA) TROY030

Webern – selected comparisons:

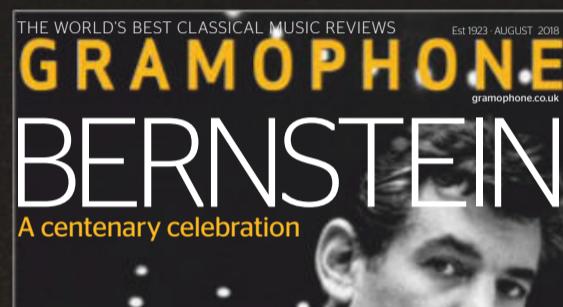
LaSalle Qt (11/71^R, 4/88^R) (DG) 479 1976GB6

Diotoma Qt (6/16) (NAIV) V5380

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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$142.87; print only annual subscription or Digital Edition or Reviews Database (\$101); Digital Club (\$134); Gramophone Club (\$167). If choosing a print option, an additional overseas P+P charge will be added at \$35.75 (Outside EU). If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

How do performers past and present relate?

When we were developing the idea for this month's cover story – a discussion about some of the leading young stars of the piano world – two key things came to mind. The first, and our starting point, was simply to delight in the fact that we seem particularly fortunate to find among today's young pianists some extraordinarily gifted and visionary individuals. What those we've highlighted – Igor Levit, Beatrice Rana, Daniil Trifonov, Yuja Wang and Benjamin Grosvenor among them – share is that when you read their name, you immediately have a vivid sense of their approach to performance, repertoire and collaboration. Each has a strong music-making identity, one which has been chronicled through our pages in reviews, including Editor's Choice and even Awards coverage. Second, there was a feeling that those mentioned in particular all somehow shared the spirit of the great soloists of the past, from the early part of the recording era, when a combination of both international concert-giving fame (which the likes of Liszt had of course achieved in a pre-microphone era) and the reach of recording together made certain pianists into beacons of brilliance and even household names. And so the feature became a tribute to both present and past – two things deeply entwined of course, reflected in the approach of many of our reviews to contextualising new recordings within the catalogue.

One of the fascinating elements of my work is getting to discuss with artists their perception of figures from earlier generations – whether in the magazine, or



Martin

on our podcasts where conversations can sometimes range more freely and informally. Some don't think about it too much, but for others it's a deep source of inspiration. For several years, as part of the *Gramophone* Hall of Fame, we invited leading artists to pay tribute to greats of the past, and their revealing responses can all be found in the artists section of our website.

So much for the musicians, what about the listener? I hope our recently enhanced coverage of reissues and box-sets has helped our readers to think about past music-making in new ways. I find it interesting, in our My Music interviews, how often it will be an iconic recording from the past that makes it into the 'Recording I can't live without' slot. And looking at the albums being re-released on vinyl, again it's often monumental historic performances that seem to particularly capture the imagination of a new generation discovering the format. There's an understandable confidence in turning to accepted achievements from the past, where time has sifted other versions and left a few shining out (though our Classics Reconsidered feature aims to make sure we don't become complacent in our assumptions).

Thanks to recording, the past is there to be enjoyed for ever. It's the soloists of today, however, those we can watch and follow, and allow ourselves to be challenged and changed by, who will shape the future. Who knows which of those we've highlighted will be the basis of debate in decades to come? I think it's quite likely many will be – but then predicting the future has always been a precarious pursuit.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'The pleasure of revisiting a great piece of Beethoven has been in glimpsing how varied musicians' points of view can be,' says **PATRICK RUCKER**

RUCKER, after writing this issue's Collection. 'Concentrated listening to these versions has enriched my appreciation of why the *Waldstein* Sonata remains so fascinating.'



'I'd heard Kirill Karabits and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra on recordings,' says **RICHARD BRATBY**, who interviews the

conductor about their latest release for *Gramophone* this issue, 'but seeing them in action together "at home" in Poole really brought their relationship into focus.'



'Trying to comment upon the current piano scene was quite the challenge, since I'm not a pundit by nature,' says **JED DISTLER**, author of our cover story. 'And if I had to mention each and every gifted emerging young keyboard luminary crossing my path, I'd still be writing this article now, and updating it daily!'

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Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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THE KIRKER SPRING MUSIC FESTIVAL AT THE HOTEL TRESANTON, ST. MAWES

A THREE NIGHT HOLIDAY | 11 MARCH 2019

Our annual visit to Olga Polizzi's fabled Hotel Tresanton in St Mawes combines a relaxing spring escape in Cornwall, with a series of world-class chamber music recitals.

Performances in 2019 will be given by the Castalian String Quartet in the Old Methodist Hall, and include works by Schumann, Haydn and Beethoven. There will also be a series of musical talks and a visit to the private garden at Lamorran, inspired by Lady Walton's garden on the island of Ischia. Dinner is included each evening at the excellent Tresanton restaurant which overlooks the sea and is lit by candles in the evening.

Price from £1,175 per person (single supp. £265) for three nights including accommodation with breakfast and dinner, three concerts each preceded by a musically illustrated talk, a visit to Lamorran Gardens and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader and a Tour Escort.



THE WEST COAST OF FRANCE: BORDEAUX, ROUEN & BRITTANY

A TEN NIGHT MUSIC CRUISE | 10 SEPTEMBER 2019

with The Chilingirian String Quartet; Simon Rowland-Jones, viola; Carole Presland, piano and Henry Neill, baritone

We set off from Liverpool and enjoy river cruising, spectacular coastal scenery and two historic cities – as well as a programme of world-class music. Our first port of call will be Lorient, then two days in Bordeaux, renowned as the world's wine capital. Sailing around the Brittany peninsula, we will travel almost 70 miles up the Seine as far as Rouen, before our last stop in picturesque Saint-Malo.



Prices from £2,635 per person for an inside cabin or £3,795 per person for a Terrace Balcony Suite for ten nights including full-board, private drinks parties, all concerts, plus exclusive talks and interviews.

THE KIRKER MUSIC FESTIVAL IN MALLORCA

A SIX NIGHT HOLIDAY | 29 MAY 2019

The works of Frédéric Chopin are central to our Festival in Mallorca and for our seventh visit we will be joined by the Phoenix Piano Trio, Marta Fontanals-Simmons, soprano and Lorena Paz Nieto, mezzo-soprano.

Based in the village of Banyalbufar, we will discover the gloriously unspoilt north coast of Mallorca. There will be visits to the picturesque artists' village of Deia, the capital Palma and the villa of San Marroig. Our series of private concerts includes a recital in the villa of the Habsburg Archduke Luis Salvador at Son Marroig.



Price from £2,290 per person (single supp. £189) for six nights including flights, accommodation with breakfast, two lunches, six dinners, five concerts, all sightseeing and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.

THE KIRKER MUSIC FESTIVAL ON LAKE COMO

A SEVEN NIGHT HOLIDAY | 23 SEPTEMBER 2019

The destination for our autumn Music Festival is one of the most beautiful corners of Italy. Lined with villas, cypress trees and low-arching mountains, Lake Como has a peaceful timelessness like no other.

The lake has inspired many composers, and we will enjoy performances by a renowned group of international soloists, including pianists Melvyn Tan and Iain Burnside, tenor Luis Gomes, baritone Sergio Vitaleis, violinist Elisabeth Perry and violist Simon Rowland-Jones. There will be an optional performance of *L'elisir d'amore* by Donizetti at La Scala in Milan. We stay at the 4★ Imperiale in the village of Moltrasio, the hotel has a lakeside restaurant and a spa with an indoor pool.

Price from £2,947 per person (single supp. £580) for seven nights including flights, transfers, accommodation with breakfast, five dinners, one lunch, five concerts, all sightseeing, entrance fees and gratuities, and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.



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GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice G

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews

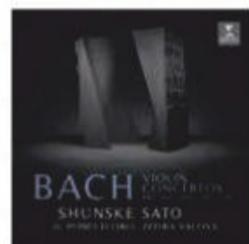


RECORDING OF THE MONTH



MONTEVERDI
Il ritorno d'Ulisse
in patria
Sols; Monteverdi
Choir; English
Baroque Soloists /
John Eliot Gardiner
SDG
► **ALEXANDRA COGHLAN'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 34**

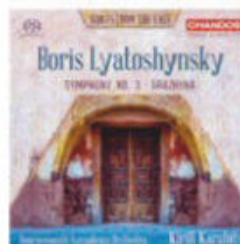
The instinctive and thrilling music-making is a given from Gardiner, but it's the compelling characterisation that really makes this recording stand out. A musical drama, beautifully told.



JS BACH
Violin Concertos
Shunske Sato, Zefira Valova vns II Pomo d'Oro Erato

These Bach concertos are approached with a tempo that is graceful rather than fiery, but the speed and space really allows an elegant and powerful personality to shine through.

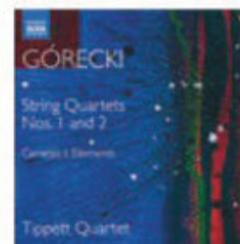
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**



LYATOSHYNSKY
Symphony No 3
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / Kirill Karabits
Chandos

As he discusses in an interview on page 28, Kirill Karabits believes this music should be much better known. An impressive album to mark 10 years with the Bournemouth Symphony.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**



GÓRECKI
String Quartets
Tippett Quartet
Naxos

Powerful music, which in some places packs the punch of much-larger forces than a string quartet, and at others possesses a moving fragility – demands which these players meet brilliantly.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**



'THE SCENE OF THE CRIME'
Håkan Hardenberger tpt
Colin Currie perc
Colin Currie Records

An inspired coupling – trumpet and percussion, that is, and specifically Håkan Hardenberger and Colin Currie – in which poetry and lyricism are wonderfully to the fore.

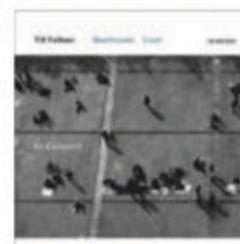
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



BARTÓK 'Racines'
Florent Boffard pf
Mirare

French pianist Florent Boffard here offers us fascinating and beautifully thought-through performances of solo Bartók piano music, impressively textured throughout and rich in personality.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**



BEETHOVEN. LISZT
Piano Sonatas
Till Fellner pf
ECM New Series

Two highly engaging performances, recorded eight years apart, of two monumental works – including Beethoven's Op 111 drawn from Fellner's tour of the composer's sonata cycle.

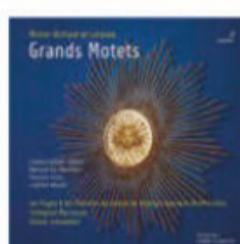
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**



FINNISSY Vocal Works
Exaudi Vocal Ensemble / James Weeks
Winter & Winter

Exaudi prove once again what a skilled ensemble they are, bringing vividly to life contemporary music of complexity, enabling listeners to understand and appreciate the composer's vision.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**



LALANDE Grands Motets
Collegium Marianum / Olivier Schneebeli
Glossa

Grand motets indeed – the performance under conductor Olivier Schneebeli, the acoustic and the context (recorded in Versailles itself), lend this music an attractive grandeur that feels highly appropriate.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**



'WAR & PEACE 1618:2018'
Dorothee Mields sop
Lautten Compagney / Wolfgang Katschner
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi

Music about conflict separated by three centuries, intriguingly programmed and expertly explored by the superb soprano Dorothee Mields.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 83**



DVD/BLU-RAY
BELLINI Norma
Sols; Metropolitan Opera, New York / Carlo Rizzi
Erato

It's for the music-making, not least 'the glorious central performances' led by Sondra Radvanovsky in the title role, that critic Hugo Shirley particularly urges you to give this *Norma* a try.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
RUDOLF SERKIN 'Early & Unpublished Recordings'
Rudolf Serkin pf
Pristine Audio

which captivated Rob Cowan in Replay: 'dignified in an especially poetic way'.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 103**

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FOR THE RECORD

Salonen leaves London and heads to San Francisco

Esa-Pekka Salonen has been named as the new Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony, succeeding Michael Tilson Thomas in 2020. He also announced that he will be stepping down as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Philharmonia Orchestra at the end of the 2020-21 season.

Salonen has served 13 years at the Philharmonia Orchestra's helm, only the sixth conductor to occupy the role in the ensemble's 75-year history. 'I have been unbelievably fortunate to conduct the great orchestras of the globe: a simultaneously inspiring and humbling part of my night job. Though since my debut 35 years ago – surprising no one more than me – and in my 10 years as Principal Conductor, I find myself returning again and again to the Philharmonia,' Salonen said.

His time at the London-based orchestra saw pioneering projects in immersive installations and virtual reality, designed



Salonen: moving from London to San Francisco

to better engage audiences old and new, beginning in 2009 with Re-Rite.

Double bass-player and the orchestra's Chair Michael Fuller said: 'Right from the first moment in 1983, the Philharmonia has had an extraordinary chemistry with Esa-Pekka and, to this day, making music with him is one of the great privileges of being a member of this orchestra.'

Of his new appointment in San Francisco, which was announced the day after the news about his future departure from the Philharmonia Orchestra emerged, Salonen said: 'I wasn't looking for another Music Directorship. I am so proud of the work we did together at the Swedish Radio Orchestra, at the LA Philharmonic, and at the Philharmonia Orchestra, and that those organisations where I've held music director titles thrive without

me gives me great joy. But there was a "no brainer" aspect to this that I've been fortunate to have experienced a few times before in my career, so I know it when I see it.'

Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider to head the Orchestre national de Lyon

Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider has been named the new Music Director of the Orchestre national de Lyon, starting in September 2020. He succeeds Leonard Slatkin who served as Music Director from 2011 to 2017 and who now takes the title of Honorary Conductor.

Szeps-Znaider (he recently has started using his full name) first came to note as a violinist, but later took up conducting and has held Principal Guest posts with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra. He also has strong ties with the London Symphony Orchestra with whom he has recorded the complete Mozart violin concertos for LSO Live.

'The Orchestre national de Lyon is based in a vibrant city that offers full and meaningful support to its cultural institutions of which the ONL is a particularly precious gem,' commented Szeps-Znaider. 'It is already a marvellous ensemble with its own distinct sound and the musicians have a healthy pride in their heritage whilst possessing the hunger necessary to climb to and reach new heights. It is an honour, a privilege and above all a great pleasure to be joining them in this quest.'

He first conducted the orchestra in December 2017 and clearly made a strong impact on the players. Aline Sam-Giao, the orchestra's Chief Executive, commented that 'I am convinced that Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider is at the ideal moment in his career to take the Orchestre national de Lyon to an unparalleled level.'



Joël Bons wins \$100,000 Grawemeyer Award

The Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition – one of the most prestigious contemporary music awards – has been given to Dutch composer Joël Bons, for his work *Nomaden*.

The composition – for which he receives \$100,000 – is an intriguing collaboration of Western classical instruments with those from other cultures, including the Chinese *erhu* and *sheng*, Japanese *sho* and *shakuhachi*, Indian *sarangi*, Turkish *kemenche*, Armenian *duduk*, Persian *setar* and Azerbaijani *tar* and *kamancha*.

Bons, 65, wrote the piece – commissioned by the 2016 Cello Biennale Amsterdam – for French cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras and the Atlas Ensemble, a group of 18 musicians from China, Japan, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Bons described *Nomaden* to *Gramophone* as 'very much a portrait' of the Atlas Ensemble. It consists of many short movements, involving Queyras as the 'nomad', on a journey, meeting and engaging in dialogue with those other instruments through duets, trios or other combinations – and in some ways, therefore, in a dialogue with those cultures themselves. 'An instrument is not just a timbre, not just a nice tool – but actually a whole culture is inside an instrument,' reflected Bons.

Nomaden is shortly to be released by the Swedish BIS label, and incidentally will be the first to use the label's new form of environmentally friendly packaging.



Vänskä to step down in Minnesota

Osmo Vänskä will step down as Music Director of the Minnesota Orchestra in August 2022, 19 years after he took up the post.

'I feel more than ever that the Minnesota Orchestra is my orchestra,' said Vänskä of the Minneapolis-based ensemble. 'As I've been thinking about how best to take care of the Orchestra's future, it has felt very natural to me that the end of my current contract is the right time for different leadership and new directions for both the Orchestra and for me.' While management searches for a successor, the musicians will make the most of the remaining years, including completing their Mahler cycle for the BIS label. Recording highlights from his tenure included a Beethoven symphony cycle, and Beethoven's piano concertos Nos 4 and 5 with Yevgeny Sudbin, also



Osmo Vänskä: handing on the baton

for BIS, while their recording of Sibelius's Symphonies Nos 3, 6 and 7 was shortlisted in the Orchestral Category of the 2017 *Gramophone* Awards. In terms of growing the orchestral repertoire, Vänskä and the orchestra have together given 64 world premieres by composers including Kalevi Aho, Jennifer Higdon and Einojuhani Rautavaara.

It hasn't all been smooth sailing – a labour dispute beginning in 2012 saw a cancelled season and, at one point, Vänskä's departure, though reflecting on that turbulent time, the orchestra also praised the conductor's role in having 'helped to create a new, more collaborative model of governance'. Whatever the reason, as Andrew Mellor noted in October's *Orchestra Focus*, 'the orchestra is arguably playing even better than it did a decade ago'.

ONE TO WATCH

Cupertinos Choir

Although founded in 2009, Cupertinos are not yet widely known outside of their native Portugal. Their first recording for Hyperion, of music by Manuel Cardoso (1566-1650 – see the review on page 71), should change that, and help to establish their position as true ambassadors of Portuguese Renaissance polyphony.

Cupertinos have produced new editions of some 90 works most of which have not been heard for over 400 years. Rescuing such obscure music is their passion, restoring these pillars of their national musical heritage and bringing them back to life. In the words of Cupertinos's director Luís Toscano: 'the most famous Portuguese composers were active in the transition between the 16th and 17th centuries, which brings us to this huge and immensely rich tradition of polyphony. Very little of this repertoire is known or performed nowadays. These works remain in manuscripts, waiting for someone like Cupertinos to come and recover this wonderful music.'

Toscano adds: 'Maybe because of the way our language works in these historic



buildings, maybe because of the particular vowel sounds, we've been told that our sound has a special character that you cannot find anywhere else in the world.' Certainly the distinctive colouring of their timbre comes through clearly on their Cardoso album. And with their next Hyperion recording featuring the music of Duarte Lôbo, another of Portugal's most famous Renaissance composers, Cupertinos's desire to bring Portuguese culture to the world will take another step forward.

GRAMOPHONE Online

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Podcasts

Last month, we celebrated Steven Isserlis's 60th birthday with a special conversation between the cellist and *Gramophone*'s James Jolly. Our Editor-in-Chief also met up with pianist Charles Owen to discuss Brahms's late piano music, which he has recorded for Avie. Editor Martin Cullingford, meanwhile, met with two choral conductors: John Butt, to talk about recording Handel's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* for Linn Records, and Edward Wickham to discuss



John Butt discusses Handel's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*

the first 10 years of the St Catharine's Girls' Choir, Cambridge and their new recording on Resonus. Find these podcasts on our website!

Recordings of the Year 2018

Our annual Recordings of the Year free digital magazine has become a seasonal *Gramophone* institution, and is invariably one of the most popular publications we create each year. The digital magazine is available for everyone to read, and in it we highlight what we consider to have been the finest recordings released over the past 12 months – including all of this year's Recordings of the Month, Editor's Choices and *Gramophone* Award-winning albums.

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ARTISTS & their INSTRUMENTS

Jean-François Heisser on the Pleyel vis-à-vis piano



“The idea of a double-keyboard piano was not new when Pleyel first built one in 1897 (and they built 74 of them, in two models - one model a grand piano, the other model more like a semi-grand). The famous maker Johann Andreas Stein had built piano-harpsichord clavessins at the end of the 18th century, and afterwards Sébastien Érard too.

The original conception, in the beginning in the 18th and 19th centuries, was for convenience at home - that you had the possibility to have two pianos within the same furniture, making it more convenient for playing transcriptions of string quartets or classical symphonies, and also for playing works for four hands.

The conception of Pleyel was very different, however. It was to create a sound

which had the best sense of homogeneity. It was invented to better fit the new repertoire then being written for two pianos, including by Liszt, who wrote music for two pianos, and of course Brahms, and Saint-Saëns.

It is very interesting to play, because when we play in concerts it is always with two Steinways, and then you have to choose between two pianos that generally wouldn't have the same qualities - one might be more soft, the other more brilliant, and it can be a difficult choice. With this Pleyel (the name ‘vis-à-vis’ means face to face), you've the same box; the sound and the resonance is really mixed together.

Each piano mechanism is independent, but there is a system whereby you can put the pedal on at the same time for the two instruments, to have the same general

resonance. But we did not really choose to do that, because you have to be very careful for the sound not to mix, and to be clear enough for the music.

This particular piano, which was built in 1928, is held in Paris's Cité de la musique. The museum there has a very rich collection of instruments, and they are making a lot of efforts to promote them. There is the museum concert hall, which is small with space for 300 people, but the instruments have to stay at the museum, they can't be transported - and so they wanted to give the public a chance to listen to it through making recordings.”

Jean-François Heisser's recording of his transcription of Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique, played on the Pleyel vis-à-vis, is released by Harmonia Mundi on January 18

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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

The suite

Lindsay Kemp on collections of pieces that expand – and those that contract

Like many musical genre terms, ‘suite’ has been thoroughly nuanced over the years. The word itself arose in the mid-17th century and derives from the French verb *suivre* (to follow), but the moment you try to explain it beyond the notion of bringing together several short instrumental pieces in a more or less ordered succession is the moment when certainties crumble. It doesn’t help that other terms have served just as well for it, including ‘sett’ (Lawes), ‘partita’ (Bach), ‘ordre’ (Couperin) and, confusingly, ‘ouverture’ (Bach again).

Any ceilidh or barn-dance band knows that to produce music lasting long enough for the revellers to get sweaty requires you to run several dances together, and many of the suite-like collections from the years up to around 1650 have their origins in actual courtly dancing. But early composers of instrumental music also realised that short dance-based pieces could be given greater weight and contrast by being presented as coupled pairs – the English pavans and galliards from the decades around 1600 by composers such as Byrd and Philips are the most familiar examples of that process today.

It was in the 17th century that suites began to resemble the Baroque sequence of refined dance movements as we know it from Bach. In France, it was the product of lutenists such as Gaultier and Mouton, and harpsichordists such as Chambonnières and Louis Couperin. True, their examples were often loosely organised sprawls of movements from which the performer could choose which ones to play, but at least they would all be in the same key. Meanwhile, in Vienna, Froberger was bringing further focus by concentrating his keyboard suites on just four dance types – allemande, gigue, courante and sarabande. This sequence (slightly reordered) would

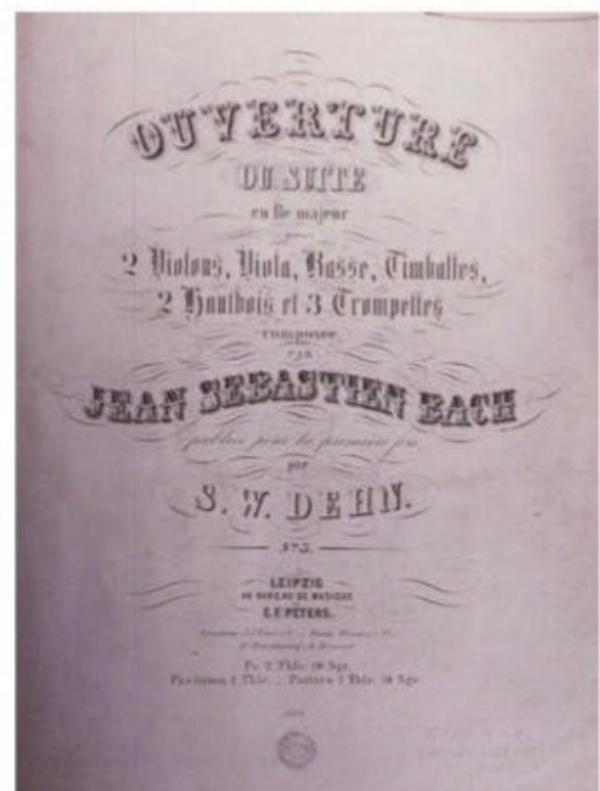
become the core of Bach’s suites, to which he would usually add a prelude or other dances such as minuets, gavottes or bourrées. It should be said that plenty of Baroque suites were not so standardised – many by Telemann

or François Couperin, for instance, make their own rules.

The Baroque suite faded in the face of the symphonies and sonatas of the Classical period, but has lived on in ‘old music’ pastiches such as Grieg’s *Holberg Suite* or Ravel’s *Le tombeau de Couperin* and in specially composed one-offs such as Sibelius’s *Karelia Suite*, Holst’s *The Planets* or Duke Ellington’s *The Queen’s Suite*.

That’s one kind of suite. But there is another, which does the opposite of trying to make small pieces seem bigger. This is what we might call the ‘highlights suite’, in which excerpts from a larger work such as an opera, ballet or film score are brought together to give a taster of the whole thing suitable for concert use. It can be said to have started with groups of orchestral dances taken from the Baroque operas of Lully, but it has certainly lasted, with such diverse works as *Carmen*, *L’histoire du soldat*, *The Nutcracker* and *Star Wars* among its most popular examples. Who would attempt to make rules for them? 

► Listen to our Suite playlist on Qobuz



The title page of Bach’s Third Orchestral Suite

IN THE STUDIO

● **Christian Tetzlaff**, the winner of Gramophone’s Concerto Award in 2018, has recorded the violin concertos of Beethoven and Sibelius. Each is its composer’s only work in the genre, and the concertos’ origins are almost exactly 100 years apart, each being composed at the start of a new century. **Robin Ticciati** and the DSO Berlin were Tetzlaff’s partners for this Ondine recording, due out in the autumn.

● The conductor Angel Gil-Ordóñez and Perspectives Ensemble have recorded two of Manuel de Falla’s dramatic works – *El retablo de Maese Pedro* and *El amor brujo* (in its 1915 version). Esperanza Fernández, one of Spain’s leading exponents of flamenco art, joined the ensemble for *El amor brujo*. Sessions for this Naxos release, due out in April, took place at the end of the summer in Scarsdale, New York.

● In November, Jared Sacks from Channel Classics was on hand to record **Florilegium** live at St Michael’s, Highgate, in a concert on the theme of Frederick the Great. Repertoire included chamber works by

CPE Bach, Graun, Quantz, Fasch and Benda. The recording will be launched at a concert on March 6 at Wigmore Hall.

● The harpsichordist **Mie Hayashi** has recorded the complete keyboard works of Joseph-Nicholas-Pancrace Royer. The sessions, for Resonus, took place in St Mary’s Church Birdsall, North Yorkshire, in October. A March release is planned.

● Before Christmas, the pianist **Alessio Bax** was at Snape Maltings recording a solo album for Signum. The Italianate programme included Rachmaninov’s *Corelli Variations*, Dallapiccola’s *Quaderno musicale di Annalibera* and two works by Liszt: *St François d’Assise: La prédication aux oiseaux* and the *Dante Sonata*.

● The **Goldfield Ensemble** has made the first commercial recording of the music of Erika Fox. The 82-year-old composer’s chamber music features on a CD for NMC, due for release in June.

ORCHESTRA *Insight...*

Los Angeles Philharmonic

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

Founded 1919

Home Walt Disney Concert Hall and Hollywood Bowl

Music Director Gustavo Dudamel

Founding Music Director Walter Henry Rothwell

When a major history of the Los Angeles Philharmonic is written many years from now, the orchestra's first golden age will be cited as the period it's in the midst of at the moment. The LA Phil has been on a crescendo for nearly three decades, powering towards its 2019 centenary with all the vision and organisational excellence that was occasionally absent in eras past.

There was stumbling mediocrity aplenty in the early years, much of it connected to an unhappy music director (Otto Klemperer), a music director who died on the job (Eduard van Beinum), a music director who might have been (Sir John Barbirolli) and the curious case of the music director who never was (Sir Georg Solti). But the arrival of Ernest Fleischmann as executive director in 1969 saw the centre of gravity shift from the maestro on the podium to something more fundamental. Fleischmann's blueprint for the orchestra of the future is still coming to fruition, and it changed the way that countless other orchestras think.

That blueprint included reimagining the orchestra itself as a community of musicians, free to perform in all manner of configurations, and to present tailored series to different audiences. It also promised to put new music at the heart of the repertoire – a risky proposition in late 20th-century America but one that found the perfect catalyst from 1992 with the arrival of Finnish composer-conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen as Music Director.



Salonen turned the LA Phil into America's premier new-music orchestra and had it recording everything from Bernard Herrmann to Anders Hillborg. He grew into the ensemble and it grew into him; the rhythmic precision in Salonen's own scores became an LA Phil hallmark. Audiences could hear the technical qualities with greater clarity from 2003 with the opening of Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall. The building's dancing metallic sails electrify the rigid corporate skyline of downtown LA, a physical manifestation of the ensemble's determination to be known more as a party-starter than as an upholder of tradition.

In which sense Gustavo Dudamel was the perfect choice to succeed Salonen in 2009. The Venezuelan has reconnected the orchestra with the city's Latin roots, brought more warmth and weight to the ensemble's midriff and put its characteristic feistiness back on the boil. He has also surprised many by fully embracing Fleischmann's new-music ethos. The LA Phil's centenary season includes works by 61 living composers, most of them commissioned for the occasion. For some, that fact alone makes it the most important orchestra in America. **Andrew Mellor**

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An inspiration: composer Sally Beamish is honoured

Beamish et al crowned at Composer Awards

Sir Harrison Birtwistle took a record eighth Award in the Orchestral category of the 2018 British Composer Awards for his work *Deep Time*. Other winners included Rebecca Saunders (Small Chamber category) for *Unbreathed* 'which uses sonic manipulation of string techniques and musical form, with poetic inscriptions on the score', and Judith Weir (Choral) for a dramatisation of the biblical Book of Job, *In the Land of Uz*. The long career of Sally Beamish was recognised when she was presented with an Award for Inspiration.

Top maestro revealed

Felix Mildenberger, the 28-year-old German conductor currently serving as assistant

conductor at Paris's Orchestre National de France, is the winner of this year's prestigious Donatella Flick conducting competition. He receives a £15,000 stipend and takes the post of the LSO's assistant conductor for a year.

Unmissable Medici

For January, our selection of videos focuses on some of the great pianists of our time, including an archive film of Martha Argerich playing Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto, Maurizio Pollini in Beethoven's Fourth and a recital by Murray Perahia (who is also the subject of this month's documentary). With the championing of a young artist and our monthly masterclass, 'Gramophone Selects' connects you with today's finest music-making. To find out more, visit **medici.tv** and type 'Gramophone Selects' into the search box.

FROM WHERE I SIT

The perils of reviewing concerts for national newspapers are hard to forget, writes Edward Seckerson



I have often been asked if I listen to music differently when reviewing or not reviewing. It's an interesting question. There is, you could say, a heightened level of awareness when 'in working mode'. One listens in finer detail and in my case the very action of taking notes (which I did copiously when writing for the *Guardian* and later the *Independent* and still do for *Gramophone*) somehow sharpened my responses. Which is not to say you ever lose your innate critical impulses when listening purely for pleasure. I'm sure I frequently irritate friends by assessing what I've just heard, and indeed there are occasions when said friends will gently rebuke me by asking if they should have enjoyed the performance or not. Fair play.

As I write this, though, my mind is flashing back to the bad old days debuting on the *Guardian* when every review was 'overnight' (meaning it had to be filed by 11pm for publication the following morning), when there was no internet or mobile phones, when the writing was done longhand and hurriedly in the corner of a bar somewhere and dictated from a public phone box to an irascible copy-taker. The horrors that made it on to the page the following morning earned the *Guardian* its nickname the 'Grauniad' and my eternal embarrassment. I would open the paper the following morning and peep through my fingers (as one might a horror film) knowing instantly at first sight of the column inches how savagely and incomprehensibly it had been cut. Never mind the sense, feel the length. Classic copy-taker mis-hearings would be there for all to see (classical music was a foreign language for most subs). There was a performance by the legendary Amadeus Quartet where the line 'with inner-tension strongly sustained' came out as 'with inattention strongly sustained'; there was Claudio Arrau's 'towering performance of the Liszt *Dante* Sonata' which became a 'cowering' performance; there was (and this doesn't even bear thinking about) 'Rita Hunter floating effortlessly above the stave' which had her 'floating effortlessly above the stage'. How my reputation was built from this daily horror show I have no idea.

In the beginning the *Independent* had nobler ideals – no overnights, properly digested, thought-through, slept-on, grown-up reviews. But not all its arts editors were so enlightened and when a star like Plácido Domingo came to town 'overnights' reared their ugly heads once more. I was asked to cover *Tosca* at the ROH – finish time 10.40pm, deadline 11pm. 'Not possible', I said. 'Then you are no use to me as an opera critic', came the reply. 'Write during the intervals'. 'I have a better idea', I said – 'why don't I write the review before the performance?'

Conclusion: I was never really cut out to be a newspaper man. The luxury of penning thoughtful, detailed, durable (and hopefully entertaining) pieces for specialist publications like *Gramophone* is still what fires me.

And further to the question posed at the start of this column, I recently attended, purely for pleasure, the Australian Chamber Orchestra's London concert of Mozart's last three symphonies – and the heady euphoria of the finale of the *Jupiter* is still with me. Liberating, and then some. I guess that's a review of sorts. **G**

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NEW AND RECENT RELEASES



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BBC Radio 3
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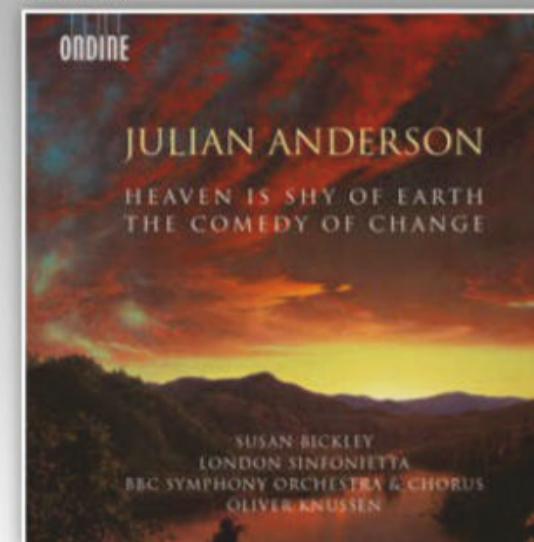
ODE 1321-2



"Hannu Lintu shapes a magnificently assured performance with the excellent FRSO ..."

"[Frank Peter Zimmermann's] eloquent tone soars through the orchestral richesse ..."
BBC Music Magazine
December 2018

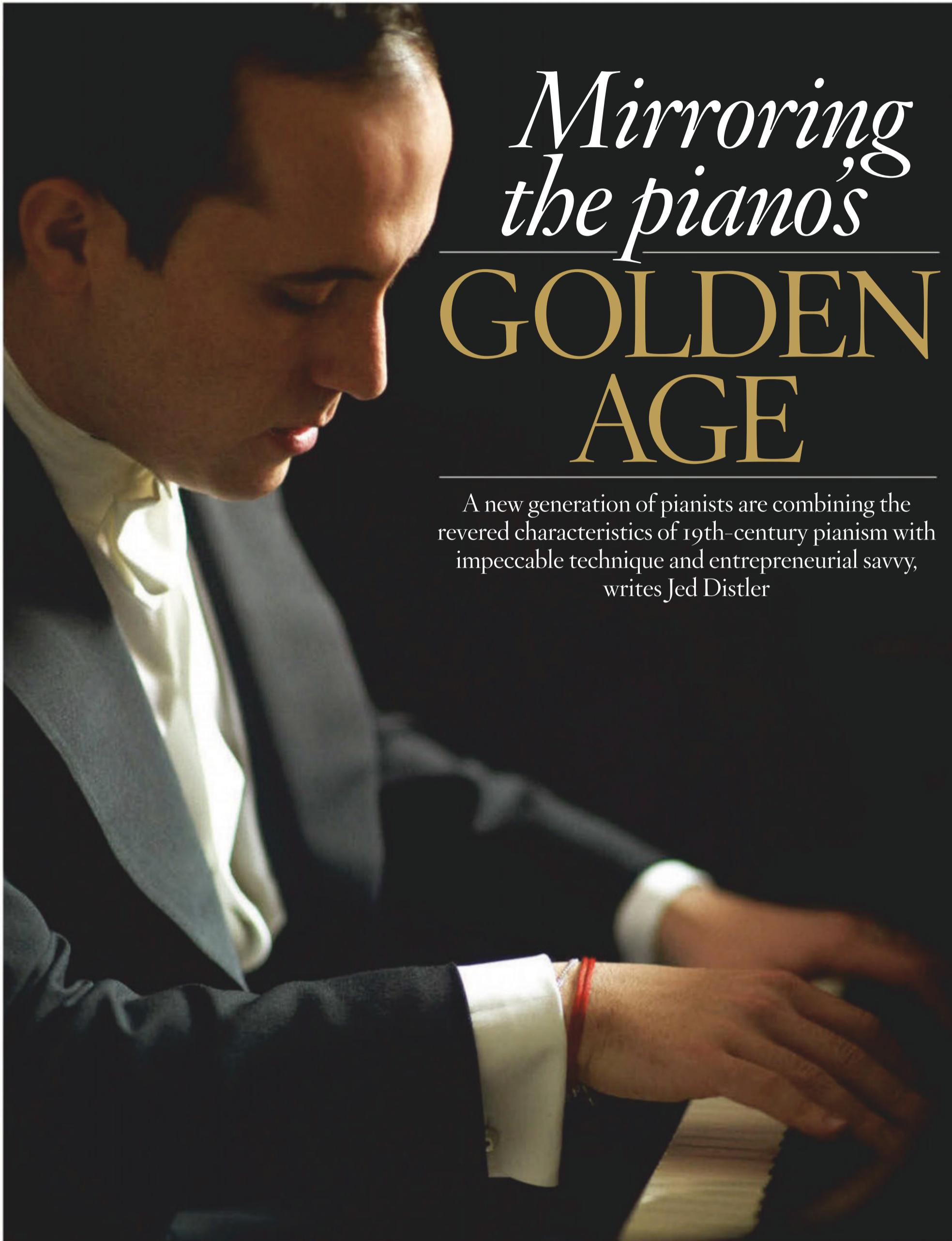
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Mirroring the piano's --- **GOLDEN AGE**

A new generation of pianists are combining the revered characteristics of 19th-century pianism with impeccable technique and entrepreneurial savvy, writes Jed Distler

The Romantic era of piano-playing has long held fascination for pianists, piano critics and piano mavens. There are several reasons for this. One is the fact that the core recital repertoire remains largely orientated in the 19th century. Another concerns great pianists rooted in that same era who learnt the Romantic traditions at close proximity to the proverbial horse's mouth, and, more significantly, lived to make recordings. You can read about them in great detail in Harold C Schonberg's landmark book *The Great Pianists* (1963). By and large they represent what many consider to be pianism's Golden Age, sharing a common aesthetic governed by tonal beauty, textural diversity, textual freedom and a preoccupation with a singing line. To be sure, some of these pianists took liberties that spilled over into eccentricity or even anarchy. Others, however, proved more discreet and controlled. But above all, these pianists conveyed a sense of individuality largely frowned upon by the literalist interpretative zeitgeist that subsequently prevailed in the second half of the 20th century. Moreover, certain areas of their repertoire, such as virtuoso showpieces, charming encores and transcriptions, fell out of fashion.

TRIFONOV, WANG AND GROSVENOR

However, the golden age is not necessarily a thing of the past, especially when one considers some of today's most successful young pianists. Daniil Trifonov's 2013 Carnegie Hall debut (recorded by Deutsche Grammophon) is a case in point. The then 21-year-old pianist's level of imagination and pianistic resource truly transcended the instrument that night. One expected his impeccable hair-trigger octaves in the Liszt Sonata, but not such fanciful manipulation of dynamics for dramatic impetus (the sudden, heart-stopping diminuendos, the emphatic accents). Furthermore, Trifonov's varied pedal effects throughout Chopin's Op 28 Preludes brought new-found urgency to the composer's daring harmonies and intricate cross-rhythmic writing. By contrast, when Trifonov offered Medtner's *Fairy Tale* Op 26 No 2 for an encore, his staggeringly supple passagework and repeated notes took wing via fingers alone, with little help from the pedal.

So great was Trifonov's performance, it could have been passed off as previously undiscovered Hofmann or Moiseiwitsch

So great was that performance that if you remastered it by adding 78rpm shellac surface noise, you'd probably be able to pass it off as a previously undiscovered Josef Hofmann or Benno Moiseiwitsch recording. But, as with his predecessors' playing, what appears natural and spontaneous with Trifonov is the result of hard work. The *New York Times* reporter Anthony Tommasini observed Trifonov preparing Schumann's *Kreisleriana* for his 2016 Carnegie Hall recital: 'This young pianist repeats passages not so much to master them technically as to bring out inner voices and myriad colorations.' Trifonov describes the process as 'paying attention to resolutions – the way sounds connect'. All this evokes a surreptitiously recorded practice session with Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli at the Royal Festival Hall, London, in 1957, where the pianist can be heard going over the same phrases ad infinitum, both refining and sharpening his projection each time. Likewise, one thinks of Vladimir Horowitz rehearsing for his 1965 Carnegie Hall comeback, debating whether to remove the three-foot-long



In his impeccable preparation, Daniil Trifonov (top) evokes Michelangeli (above) – who would practise a phrase 'ad infinitum'; (opposite) 'mature master' Igor Levit



Horowitz (right) was loath for others to play his *Carmen Variations*, but that hasn't stopped Wang, who also adds her own touches

red tape from inside the piano to brighten the sound; or Leopold Godowsky, painstakingly adjusting voicings and balances between hands to accommodate the limitations of early recording technology.

Yuja Wang, who turns 32 in February, shares some of Trifonov's repertoire predilections, but her approach tends to be more free-spirited – as witness the equally subjective yet dissimilar *Kreisleriana* she played at Carnegie Hall a few months before Trifonov. She restlessly explored inner voices, brought bass lines to the fore and shifted the pulse when it suited her. Yet she displayed consistent polyphonic focus throughout the fugue of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata, building its gnarly momentum without losing energy. Perhaps it was misguided for Wang to follow up with those flashy encores, but that's what her audience wanted and she played them with insouciant joy.

Although Horowitz was touchy and guarded about sharing his *Carmen Variations*, more and more young pianists are taking them up, including Wang, who also adds her own flourishes. Her affinity for bygone keyboard icons extends to her taking on Georges Cziffra's interlocking octave romp through *The Flight of the Bumblebee*, plus my own transcription of *Tea for Two* taken from Art Tatum's 1933 recording. And when Wang recorded Brahms's *Paganini Variations*, she eschewed the Urtext in favour of Michelangeli's controversial yet admittedly effective reordering. While in Stravinsky's *Three Movements from Petrushka*, she goes against the composer's dynamics and

phrasing, but in doing so heightens the score's whimsy, lightness and narrative interest.

One encounters a parallel 'old-school' sensibility in the 26-year-old Benjamin Grosvenor, who was quoted in the *New York Times* thus: 'I never want to hear people praise a performance as just about the music, because it's not. The player is there too, and part of it.' His recording of Bach's D major Partita harkens back to another era in regard to his avoidance of repeats and the way in which he allows sheer tonal beauty and a wide palette of nuances to take precedence over the kind of linear specificity one hears from seasoned Bach stylists

such as Murray Perahia, András Schiff and Angela Hewitt.

'One of the most memorable listening experiences of my early teenage years was hearing for the first time the Bach playing of Edwin Fischer and Samuil Feinberg,' Grosvenor told *Gramophone* when he was approached for this feature. 'Up to that point, I'd felt quite ambivalent towards the keyboard music of Bach on the piano, but hearing the luminous playing of these two pianists, I was struck by the enormous richness that comes through playing it with this kind of fantasy, colour and imagination at the keyboard; there need be no concessions, confident in the knowledge that playing Bach on the piano is unashamedly a form of transcription.'

Grosvenor's programmes offer a judicious balance of substantial fare and pure, unadulterated ear candy. It's not every pianist, after all, who can render a vividly detailed and utterly

effortless 'Scarbo' from Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* alongside a perfectly proportioned Moszkowski étude or Godowsky's serpentine transformation of Saint-Saëns's 'The Swan'. Grosvenor's Chopin Scherzos, meanwhile, count among the best ever recorded; fanciful touches, long-buried counterlines and surprising rubatos consistently fall from his sleeves like rabbits from a magician's hat, yet these gestures enhance rather than dissipate Chopin's structures. As for the Liszt arrangements of Chopin's *My Joys* and *Maiden's Wish*, Grosvenor's amazingly even filigree yields nothing whatsoever to Hofmann's justly fabled 1935 HMV test pressings. Again, if you added 78rpm surface swish to Grosvenor's recordings, piano collectors would be bending over backwards praising Hofmann! And if you want a modern-day Alfred Cortot, consider Beatrice Rana's live Schumann *Symphonic Etudes* from the 2013 Cliburn Competition when she was just 20 years old. It's as if she was ignoring the jury and letting her young heart and old soul give in to ecstatic expression, while never missing a note.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Today's resurgence of Romantic performance practice and a quest for individuality didn't just happen overnight, and should be evaluated in the context of a gradual sea change over time that only began after many pianists first returned to a more understated, objective way of playing. In the first half of the 20th century, pianist Artur Schnabel's concern with textual fidelity and the structural and metaphysical aspects of music held considerable sway. Even the larger-than-life icon Arthur Rubinstein gradually modified his style with the times; he became more meticulous and less cavalier as he aged, as did Wilhelm Kempff – albeit to a lesser extent. Schnabel's belief in serious programming and artistic rectitude went on to influence generations of pianists, including Rudolf Serkin, Alfred Brendel and Maurizio Pollini, and still prevails in some circles today. Marc-André Hamelin, for example, admits that, although certain old-time pianists' casual attitudes towards the text rubbed off on him in his youth, his involvement in chamber music led him to pay greater attention to the score's finer details. 'I would say that my musical outlook nowadays is an amalgam of these two tendencies,' he says. 'A liberating sense of freedom is tempered by a respect for what the composer intended.'

Despite Schnabel's influence in the early 1900s, there remained outliers who caused a stir or two in the face of fashion (if not quite upsetting the status quo's proverbial apple cart like Glenn Gould or the young Ivo Pogorelich), from the mercurial Shura Cherkassky to the freewheeling Georges Cziffra. And Horowitz, of course, was billed as 'the last romantic' in his final performing years. In addition, just as the early days of long-playing discs gave birth to a Baroque revival, the '60s brought forth numerous discs devoted to neglected and largely unrecorded 19th-century keyboard fare. (Admittedly, the performances varied in quality and often enlisted pianists who were technically and stylistically unsuited to such works, Raymond Lewenthal and Earl Wild the notable exceptions.)

When CDs appeared on the market in the 1980s, so did a resurgence of this repertoire (Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto Series, for example), this time championed by a new generation of pianists. As Emanuel Ax said at the time, 'Everyone plays so amazingly now. When I was coming up, there were two or three specialists we referred to as the only ones who could play these works. Now everyone plays them – it's as though there's nothing hard anymore!'

Ax was surely referring to, among others, the aforementioned Hamelin, who would think nothing of opening a recital with

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In the music of Chopin arranged by Liszt, Benjamin Grosvenor (main picture) 'yields nothing' to the 1935 recording by Hofmann (right): 'If you added 78rpm surface swish to Grosvenor's recording, collectors would be praising Hofmann!'

Godowsky's Passacaglia, a work that Horowitz deemed impossible, while setting empyrean performance standards on behalf of Alkan, Reger, Grainger, Medtner, and nearly every other marginalised Romantic piano composer. As for Carlo Grante and Francesco Libetta, one doubts that even Godowsky himself would have dared to tackle the complete cycle of his 53 Studies on Chopin Études in concert, as they both famously did. Meanwhile, Stephen Hough dusted off and breathed new life into long-forgotten 19th-century encores early on in his career; he also concocted a number of original transcriptions ranging from Roger Quilter songs to Richard Rodgers's

My Favourite Things. And we should bring to mind, too, Mikhail Pletnev, famed for his highly personalised interpretations and frequently played arrangements, and also Arcadi Volodos, who not only mastered Horowitz's fabled transcriptions to perfection but also made them convincingly his own, while elaborately retooling singular Horowitz encores such Moszkowski's F major Étude. In addition, Cyprien Katsaris, who worked with Cziffra, demonstrated that he could sail through the Beethoven/Liszt symphonies with unprecedented assurance and maverick audacity, and consequently developed a reputation as a veritable transcription chowhound.

How could Levit, relatively unknown, hold his own next to Pollini and Brendel? With flying colours, as it turned out

A NEW BRAND OF AUDACITY

We were now witnessing a revival of interest in Romantic repertoire from pianists who could demonstrate a new level of technical assurance coupled with individualistic flair. This then paved the way for a different brand of audacity, an example of which presented itself in 2013, when Sony Classical released the Russian-born/German- and Austrian-trained Igor Levit's debut recording, consisting of no less than the last five

Beethoven sonatas. How could a relatively unknown 26-year-old pianist possibly hold his own alongside Pollini and Brendel? With flying colours, as it turned out, and with even more colour to

his sonority, possessing a clear yet pearly legato evocative of Schnabel and Edwin Fischer. As *Gramophone*'s Harriet Smith aptly declared, Levit's Beethoven was 'neither reckless nor arrogant, but a debut of true significance' (11/13). Levit's fusion of probity, vitality and spiritual depth amounted to that of a mature master at the height of his powers. Not content to stop there, Levit went on to offer a Bach Partitas set, followed by a triple whammy in the form of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, and Frederic Rzewski's comparably monumental variations on Sergio Ortega's Chilean resistance song, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, which captured a well-deserved *Gramophone* Award.

And while transcriptions figure in Levit's latest Sony release, they are the kind that illuminate more than merely entertain: Brahms's Bach Chaconne for the left hand alone, two Liszt/Wagner works, Busoni's demanding piano version of Liszt's organ Fantasia and Fugue, Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Ad nos, ad salutarem undam*, and Bill Evans's 1958 *Peace Piece*. Levit casts the transcription of Evans's original improvised recording as darker, more brooding – evocative less of inner peace than of despair and resignation.

Levit shares Rzewski's passion for political discourse and activism – in fact, the homepage of Levit's website introduces him as 'pianist, musician, citizen'. He memorably prefaced his November 2016 Brussels recital with a speech lashing out at the newly elected American president and denouncing Brexit and the rise of the far right in France and Germany. He's also active on Twitter, regularly posting about both musical and political topics. Like many artists, Levit has grasped that opportunities for public exposure can stretch far beyond the concert platform. And it seems that there are no rules so far as this is concerned – as witness Lang Lang, who has taken to promoting his own perfume, vodka and fashion lines.

SELF-EXPRESSION, UNIQUE PROGRAMMING

There are no limits nowadays when it comes to self-expression, and it stands to reason that this attitude is influencing current performance practice. While websites like YouTube have made it easy to access more than 100 years of archived performances with a click of a button, most pianists are realising that simply emulating keyboard masters from the past isn't the answer.

Even purely musical ends can go hand in hand with unusual programming ideas and entrepreneurial savvy. Take Dejan Lazić and David Greilsammer, both pianists who mix and match short, stylistically divergent piano works, creating a contemporary context that's closer to DJ culture than what you'd encounter in the traditional concert hall. Similarly, Jonathan Biss has reached out to new audiences via his free online course on the 32 Beethoven Sonatas. And among pianists cornering the niche market, Jeroen Van Veen stands out for his inexpensive multi-disc anthologies that aim to comprehensively explore Minimalism's highways and byways. Earl Wild, meanwhile, may not have fulfilled his desire to devote a full recital to improvisation, but, as Gabriela Montero, Denis Matsuev, Kirill Gerstein and Steven Osborne have all demonstrated, classical pianists now seem less intimidated about 'winging it'.

Pianist and educator Dr Lisa Yui suggests that today's paradigm shift towards greater



In his debut recording of the last five Beethoven sonatas, Igor Levit demonstrated 'a clear yet pearly legato evocative of Artur Schnabel or Edwin Fischer [inset]'

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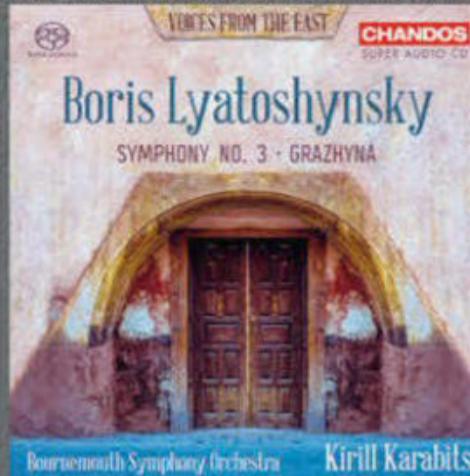
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individuality in repertoire and programming concepts directly relates to the diminished influence on careers of major competitions. ‘Years ago, the winners of the Queen Elisabeth, Tchaikovsky and Chopin competitions plunged right into a full international concert schedule, with a major record label deal in tow. That’s no longer the preferred route for the best young pianists. And consequently, these musicians tend to avoid the obligatory competition-orientated repertoire. Instead, they play music that they know an audience will enjoy, or else stick with music that they are particularly passionate about, yet that can somehow communicate across the footlights.’

HEAR THE CURRENT GENERATION

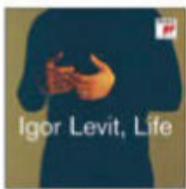
Recordings from four of today’s most creative pianists



Benjamin Grosvenor

Schulz-Evler Arabesques on Johann Strauss's 'By the Beautiful Blue Danube'
Decca Ⓜ 478 5334DH (9/14)

Benjamin Grosvenor gives a sparkling account of a virtuoso showpiece that was recorded by many old-school greats, not least Josef Lhévinne in 1928. Grosvenor's choice of repertoire, as well as his style of playing, shows how aware he is of his pianistic inheritance.



Igor Levit

Liszt Fantasia and Fugue on 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undam', S259 (arr Busoni)
Sony Classics Ⓜ ② 88985 42445-2 (11/18)

Igor Levit's mixing of core repertoire with less familiar music to which he feels a special connection is illustrated by his recent album, 'Life'. His playing of Busoni's arrangement of Liszt's Fantasia on 'Ad nos' is fluent and nuanced, and shows his ability to clarify complex music.



Beatrice Rana

Schumann Études symphoniques, Op 13
Harmonia Mundi Ⓜ HMU90 7606 (2/14)

Beatrice Rana's Schumann, which helped her to win a silver medal at the 2013 Van Cliburn competition, shows the range of her musical and pianistic imagination. Free and passionate, these interpretations are alive with a care for texture and inner voicing that evokes memories of Alfred Cortot or Martha Argerich.



Yuja Wang

Gluck/Sgambati Mélodie (from *Orfeo ed Euridice*)
DG Ⓜ 479 0052GH (6/12)

Recorded by Rachmaninov and Petri and many pianists since, Sgambati's straightforward take on Gluck's melody allows Yuja Wang to show her ability to sing and sustain a line. She does this with flexible rubato and a gorgeous three-dimensional tone.



Beatrice Rana: ‘a modern-day Alfred Cortot’ when she performs Schumann live

Just how these current young firebrands will fulfil their potential remains to be seen. ‘People always ask me who I think the best young pianists are,’ said Earl Wild to me in an interview on the cusp of his 80th birthday. ‘That’s impossible to answer. You can never know if someone will be great when they’re barely 20. Piano-playing at the highest level comes with time and maturity. It’s a difficult life.’ Right now, we’re living in an uncertain yet exciting era of shifting trends and

attitudes regarding what it means to be a concert pianist. And yet, as we witness an unusually high level of keyboard talents en route to finding their path, their identity, we are surely not only re-creating the piano’s Golden Age but reinventing it. **G**

MARVEL AT WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Recordings from four of the greats of the Golden Age



Ignaz Friedman

Chopin Nocturne in E flat major, Op 55 No 2 (rec 1936)
Naxos Historical Ⓜ 8 111114 (8/37R, 12/90R)

This is one of the most famous of all Chopin recordings, a prime example of the sort of singing line, subtle rubato and succulently extravagant tone that marked out the greatest pianists of the old school. At his best, Friedman exemplifies a perfect blend of technique and temperament. Listen, too, to his Chopin Études.



Josef Hofmann

Chopin Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise, Op 22 (rec 1937)
VAI Ⓜ VAIA 1020 (5/93)

Taken from Hofmann's legendary Golden Jubilee Concert at the Met in New York on November 28, 1937, this recording contrasts a beautifully lyrical Andante spianato with an effortlessly free and fanciful Grande Polonaise, shoals of notes dancing under his fingers.



Benno Moiseiwitsch

Liszt La leggierezza (rec 1941)
Naxos Historical Ⓜ 8 110669

For tonal control, fluid rhetoric, soaring ardency and old-school charm you have to go a long way to match Moiseiwitsch's recording of Liszt's concert étude 'La leggierezza'. Few pianists marshall the step-wise bass line with such purpose, and to finish he also throws in Leschetizky's audacious ending.



Sergei Rachmaninov

Schumann Carnaval, Op 9 (rec 1929)
RCA Red Seal Ⓜ ⑩ 8 88430 73922 2 (3/93R)

There are many of Rachmaninov's recordings that could illustrate his inimitable rubato, and his rhythmic freedom allied to emotional control. Few would dare to play Schumann like this now, but then few could match Rachmaninov's recreate personality.

STAR storyteller

From Wolf Lieder to the operatic stage, soprano Diana Damrau knows how to engage an audience, finds David Patrick Stearns

Whether opening a new *Traviata* at the Metropolitan Opera, preparing for a winter residency at the Barbican or recording Hugo Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch*, Diana Damrau invariably arrives with a lively 'backstory'. You can feel it bubbling behind her conspiratorial smile.

Recording the *Italienisches Liederbuch* live for Erato on a 12-city tour in early 2018, she and tenor Jonas Kaufmann knew that, particularly with Kaufmann's wide-ranging fan base, one challenge was going to be winning over listeners who were more familiar with light Italian crowd-pleasers like 'O sole mio' than Wolf's brainy, compact character sketches.

If you want loud music, go to a disco. If you want something that's subtle, that touches people, you must go to the opera'

'But it was always sold out and people loved it,' Damrau said. The last of three concerts at the Barbican in 2019 (two in January and one in March) includes a world premiere, Iain Bell's *The Hidden Place*, with poetry by Damrau's aunt Christa Palmer reflecting intimate moments shared by two lovers throughout the four seasons. ('Quite sexy poems,' she says, 'and the way Iain has put them to music, you can smell autumn, you can feel a summer that's lush and hot.') As for the new *Traviata*, the Met's Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin volunteered his backstage view during rehearsals: 'In my opinion, she's at the height of her talent – the height of her capacities – vocally and intellectually, and she looks great. She's having an incredible time.' Judging from the response at opening night, the audience was inclined to agree.

Such high praise also comes with expectations – ones she can meet, but perhaps do without. 'Nowadays, everybody wants the best of you – the best in singing, the best in movement, the best look – while forgetting that singing is high sport. You can try to go to the limits but not constantly. You must save your body and voice,' she said. 'I have tried to work out breathing

and singing lines by riding a trainer bike at the gym. In Laurent Pelly's *La fille du régiment*, I was running around with weapons ... I had to jump into a pile of laundry!' Another risky production was the split-screen *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Covent Garden that continued showing Lucia when she would normally be offstage – killing her would-be husband, among other things, and leaving Damrau no time to rest. 'Sometimes', she concluded, 'it feels a bit like survival training.'

Underneath these medium-humoured complaints, she has larger concerns about the state of opera. The more dense the dramatic activity on stage in the Covent Garden *Lucia*, she observed, the slower the opera's tempos became. 'When I looked at it later, I thought, "What the hell were we doing?" We had so much acting [to fit in] that the music expanded somehow,' she said. 'But in the moment, we didn't feel it.'

Another ongoing concern: volume. Even in her early days of high coloratura repertoire, she always had a clean, full-bodied, well-projected voice. Nonetheless – 'I think our time is a bit dangerous for voices. If you compare with Mozart's time, the [orchestral] instruments now have double the sound. So then the voice has to be more and more dramatic and loud. But music is not loudness,' she said. 'If you want loud music go to the cinema and the discotheque. If you want subtle things and music that is not for dancing but tells a story, that's not just an idea but that goes deep into people's feelings, you must go to opera. And we have to touch people. It's not about the gigantic.'



PHOTOGRAPH: REBECCA FAY/ERATO/WARNER CLASSICS

No surprise that two of her discs that she particularly treasures were made with Jérémie Rhorer and his period-instrument orchestra, whose smaller sound and lively sensibility allowed her to sing what she says was the fastest coloratura of her life.

Touring this May with harpist Xavier de Maistre isn't necessarily a respite. 'The harp can get very loud too. I was surprised. The sound can be full and rich,' she said. 'But it's not like a piano where you have this sound that is sustained in the hall. Yes, that means that, as a singer, you're more exposed – but that's no reason to be scared.'

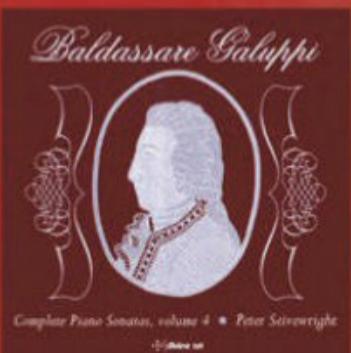
Such priorities and values were expressed over a Saturday-morning early-December breakfast at a cafe on New York's Upper East Side near the apartment where she was staying. Best to talk somewhere other than home, she explained, where her two young sons would still be running around in

their pyjamas (her husband, bass Nicolas Testé, was wrapping up a run of *The Pearl Fishers* at the Met and preparing to fly back to Europe for *L'enfance du Christ*). Christmas, she said, would be seeing the family back together in New York, though the gregarious Damrau vowed to temper her presence at festive parties to save her voice for *Traviata*. Her Violetta photo is the Met's primary promotional image this season and can be seen across the city, thanks partly to the eagerly anticipated new production by Broadway director Michael Mayer, whose updated Las Vegas *Rigoletto* a few seasons back had Damrau's Gilda being stuffed into the trunk of a Cadillac. (For the record, she didn't mind at all: 'It was padded. There was water ...')

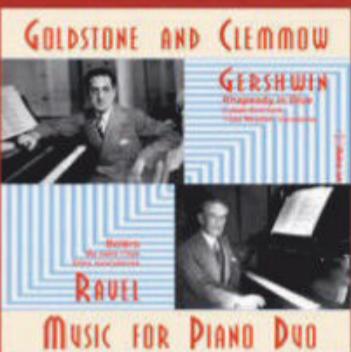
Now 47, the Zurich-based Damrau has sung 50 roles, starting with Mozart's Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* that was heard in some 15 productions around the world before

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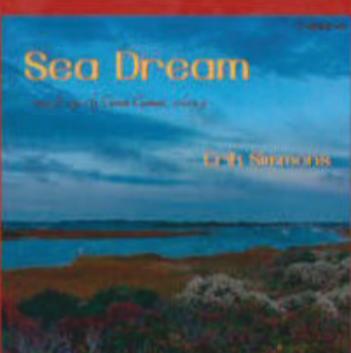
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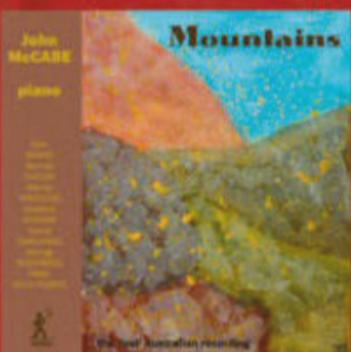
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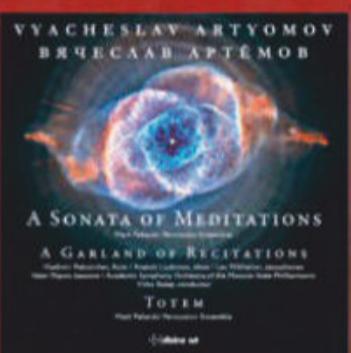
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she moved on to more lyric soprano roles. Her discography of 47 CDs and DVDs runs from Mozart operas with Nézet-Séguin to Japanese children's songs. But the journey to there from her native Günzburg in Bavaria was hardly foreseeable. She heard her grandfather's opera recordings – Wagner and *Der Freischütz* – but wasn't interested. That all changed at the age of 12 when, home alone one night and watching TV, the Franco Zeffirelli film of *La traviata* came on. The film's star, Teresa Stratas, changed Damrau's life immediately. 'I cried,' the singer recalled. 'I thought opera-singing was people making funny faces and screaming. It looked unnatural. But when I saw her, it was the most natural and touching and beautiful thing I'd ever seen in my life. I wanted to learn how to sing opera. Stratas and Maria Callas are my ideal Violettas.'

Once in the profession, after studies at the Hochschule für Musik Würzburg, she quickly discovered that the stand-and-sing approach of some opera houses would never have worked with Damrau's early role of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* in Würzburg, which dovetailed into her first Queen of the Night. Now, no matter what she is playing, physical movement is inseparable from making music. One finds parallels in Leonard Bernstein, who claimed that taming his physical extravagance also brought down the temperature of his music-making. Damrau understands that.

'It doesn't mean you have to jump and run around all the time and put your arms up with every high note. And it's not easy to make this look natural,' she said. 'You have the subtext of singing technique next to the subtext of acting. It takes a long time to master all of this and to be able to put the right expression with your body that makes it look natural. But you have to move – singing is energy.' And, for Damrau, energising the pauses is equally important.

One of the more telling fusions of theatre and singing is how she ends the wordless coloratura in the Act 1 'Sempre libera' aria in *Traviata*: Damrau has Shakespeare's Hamlet in her mind's eye as she runs the emotional gamut from A to Z. There are so many Lieder-like details passing by so quickly – might Lieder lie at the core of

her musical sensibility? 'That's kind of a long leap,' she said. 'But Lieder does give tools that help with acting, with building a character.' Beyond Callas and Stratas, idols are Kiri Te Kanawa for tone, Joan Sutherland for technique and Edita Gruberová for close reading of *bel canto* scores.

Yet Damrau has something the others rarely had: uninhibited

spontaneity. It's under the surface in her opera portrayals but first took New York by storm in a 2010 Met Orchestra concert at Carnegie Hall, which was her only

working experience with James Levine. Wearing the wild patchwork dress with an epic-length train seen on the cover of her 2009 'Coloraturas' opera arias album, she not only sang the Strauss Zerbinetta aria 'Grossmächtige Prinzessin' but encored part of it while flashing the dress around the stage to the audience's complete delight.

But such stage flourishes were only the beginning. On one talk show with Jonas Kaufmann, she was seen pulling him up from his chair and waltzing around the studio. Hugo Wolf recitals can be refined connoisseur occasions, but not on the Damrau/Kaufmann tour in February. In the performance of the final song, in which Damrau portrays a woman trying to instil jealousy in her lover by counting all the men she has had, she ended by giving Kaufmann a lusty swat on his bottom. Did he mind? 'No. He was happy!' she said, adding that the gesture was dramatically motivated by the music's sensibility. 'It's like in Italy. You throw plates and then you kiss each other. Jonas feels like family to me, probably because we're both Bavarian. We have the same base feeling in the way we work.'

The Wolf project, though, didn't fit easily into their lives. The collection of 46 songs written in 1890 and 1896 is based on short, pithy poems in German translation by Paul Heyse that cover a huge range of emotions, in a post-Wagnerian language but



Damrau and Kaufmann perform Wolf at the Barbican in February, accompanied by Helmut Deutsch; the trio in playful mood (inset)

With Flórez in *La traviata*: on stage and, right, the Met's publicity shot

with anti-Wagnerian and un-Italianate concentration (some songs are as short as 45 seconds). Many are like snapshots from Goya paintings, depicting everyday people caught in unguarded moments.

Not every singer or recording label is aching to record the collection, whose smallish but distinguished discography includes Lieder legends such as Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. This new recording was spearheaded by pianist Helmut Deutsch, who has worked with both singers before and, as long ago as 1996, came up with his own order for the songs with an ear for creating a narrative to help unify the far-flung poetic content: 'Helmut wanted to put a structure into the songs, since the collection is not a song-cycle – it's just a book on an Italian-based theme,' explained Damrau. 'So we made blocks of four songs – sad songs, war songs ...'

Inspired by Deutsch's enthusiasm – 'I want to do this before I die' he told them – both singers put their agents to work on creating a tour on which the cycle would be recorded live. They were presented with 12 dates in February with just one day off in between and hitting most major European music capitals. Damrau balked: 'I said, "Can we do this?" And Helmut said, "Ja ja ja ja". We met each other only two days before the first recital, but everybody had prepared on their own.'

Many of the male songs involve the worship of women. 'They decorate us with sugar and cream, but by the end we're this "mama" figure,' said Damrau. 'It's so funny.' But it's her songs that are the funniest, describing an often-peculiar succession of men, such as the less-than-charismatic musician in 'Wie lange schon war immer mein Verlangen'. In 'Mein Liebster ist so klein,' the suitor is so small that his curls drag on the ground. What to make of that? Is it an inside joke? 'Think what you like!' Damrau said playfully, adding that she ended the song with a chaste kiss into the air.

The recording was made mid-tour in Essen, with only two patch sessions, mostly to cover the audience coughing. 'They were a great audience but they were all sick,' Damrau recalled. 'The recording is a great memory of a wonderful time, when we were able to perform so many concerts in a short time.'

the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*?

'It must come, one day. Yes,' she said. 'The composers for my voice are Mozart, Strauss, Donizetti. With Strauss, the orchestra is huge and the vocal lines sit lower. But *Capriccio* is more of a conversation piece, with interesting characters, and is fun to do.'

Most singers have a role that 'got away'. For Leontyne Price, it was the Marschallin. For Schwarzkopf, it was Desdemona. And Damrau? 'I would love to do Carmen, but it's not for me. There are soprano versions of Carmen but there are fantastic mezzo-sopranos and it is a mezzo role. We have *Traviata*, they have *Carmen*. But oh my God, would I love to do that role.'

The morning was slipping away. She noticed the time: 'My family needs me!' she exclaimed, and one talking point – her Royal Opera appearances in Gounod's *Faust* in April, which will take her further into lyric soprano territory – was lost in the shuffle. Time for one last question though. Having cycled out of the fierce coloratura of the Queen of the Night and into the more lyrical Pamina in *The Magic Flute*, has she ever found herself in a production with one of her coloratura successors and thinking, 'That's not how it should be done'?

Damrau shook her head vigorously. Her view, she explained, was that she doesn't own roles; she is only their caretaker. Surely she must revisit the Queen's music in private though? She smiled and hummed a little bit of the melody. 'I try a little,' she said, 'but it's just for fun.'

*Diana Damrau's recording of Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch* with Jonas Kaufmann on Erato will be reviewed next issue*

Each concert, we were trying to do it better. We didn't talk about it much. It just happened.'

Reuniting with Kaufmann and Deutsch would be great, she admitted. The question is how. Maybe the Wolf *Spanisches Liederbuch*? She nodded vaguely. Their opera repertoires have diverged greatly, but what about *Otello*? After all, Kaufmann has already taken on the title-role and Damrau has sung Desdemona's final scene in concert. The singer was startled at the thought. 'That would be cool. That would be amazing,' she murmured. 'I'd love to.'

For the moment, though, there's plenty else she's focusing on. One of the more intriguing items in her Barbican residency is that concert on March 31 with the LSO which not only features the Iain Bell premiere but also the last scene from Strauss's final opera, *Capriccio*. And if that's a good fit, doesn't that put her next door to the greatest Strauss role,

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Martin Randall Festival participant in 2017

Photo: Gabrieli, performing at 'Music in the Cotswolds' 2018, ©Bill Knight.

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HOME FROM HOME

For 10 years, Kirill Karabits has been impressed by his Bournemouth musicians' adventurous attitude to new repertoire, and their latest project – the music of fellow Ukrainian Boris Lyatoshinsky – is no exception, he tells Richard Bratby

Kirill Karabits is multitasking. Suitcase trailing behind him, smartphone in hand, he's leading us through the backstage labyrinth of the Lighthouse arts centre, Poole, while also trying to confirm his luggage allowance for his flight home to Paris later this November afternoon. Forget about Karajan and his private jet – these days, even conductors of Karabits's energy and charisma aren't immune to the petty hassles of budget air travel. You wouldn't guess, from his brisk, no-nonsense manner, that just a few hours earlier he'd conducted the world premiere of *Testament* – a brand new song-cycle by Mark-Anthony Turnage, co-commissioned by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Karabits's 'other' band, the Weimar Staatskapelle.

Gennady Rozhdestvensky said that if Lyatoshinsky had lived in Moscow, his name would stand next to Shostakovich's

'I think it's a wonderful piece of music, and I'm looking forward to doing it again,' he declares, as soon as he's logged out of that airline app. I've got to agree: it's an immediately striking piece, in which Turnage has clearly set out to capture something of the musical character of Karabits's native Ukraine. 'It was very personal,' comments Karabits. 'It was very touching for me. But still, it is definitely British music – the language and the colours that he uses. He's following in that Walton-Britten tradition, but he makes it his own.'

Karabits, the soprano soloist Natalya Romaniw and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra all made it their own too, and a delighted Turnage positively bounded down through the audience to take his bow. Glière's symphonic seascape *The Sirens* had opened the concert, and then, after the interval, came a remarkably apt sequel – the symphonic suite from Prokofiev's *War and Peace*. The final peroration brought cheers from the Dorset crowd. Riding the applause, Karabits whipped round and hurled his orchestra into a performance of Glière's Russian Sailors' Dance (from *The Red Poppy*) which didn't so much light up the hall as ricochet around it like a stray bullet.

The audience erupted again, and something about the relationship between this conductor, this orchestra and this audience started to fall into place. Karabits had been conducting music in which – on a deeply personal level – he believes. The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra repaid conviction with conviction; the audience, in turn, found a connection with

music with which many of them will surely have been entirely unfamiliar. And then that encore: a gift, a little musical token of appreciation to seal the shared experience. It felt spontaneous, and was, at the same time, exactly the sort of moment you'd expect from a musical partnership that's celebrating its 10th anniversary. So I'm genuinely surprised by what Karabits tells me next.

'It was my first time. I've never done any of the pieces we played yesterday. Not even the Russian Sailors' Dance. No. Never.' In fact, he's only just realised that, as we shall see, he has a family connection with the piece. 'Only yesterday I was speaking to my mother before the concert. She's a musicologist. And she told me that the Russian Sailors' Dance, as well as the rest of the ballet *The Red Poppy*, was actually orchestrated by Lyatoshinsky. Glière was a busy man, and he didn't have time to orchestrate it, so he gave it to Lyatoshinsky – one of his best students. I didn't know that until yesterday.'

It's the happiest of happy coincidences, because it brings us round to the Ukrainian composer I was determined to talk to him about – that very same Boris Lyatoshinsky (1895–1968). Karabits's father, a composer, studied with Lyatoshinsky, while Karabits's mother is one of the leading authorities on his music. And now Karabits and the Bournemouth SO have recorded Lyatoshinsky's massive Third Symphony of 1951. 'It's just great music. It's really great music,' Karabits enthuses. 'You know, Gennady Rozhdestvensky said that if only Lyatoshinsky had lived in Moscow during Soviet times, his name would stand next to Shostakovich's. He said that. And it's true. Lyatoshinsky wasn't interested in his career. He liked being at home and he liked living in Kiev. He was not a very ambitious man. But he is the key figure in Ukrainian music.'

And it's a safe bet that if you enjoy 20th-century Soviet symphonism at its most epic, this massive post-Romantic score will pull you straight in. Once you've spotted all the obvious influences – the monumental power of Shostakovich, the





Making himself at home: Karabits at St Giles House, around 15 miles north of Poole; in Poole itself, the conductor has a quayside flat with views of Brownsea Island

lyricism of Prokofiev, the hints of Glazunov and Scriabin (or, more likely, Glière, with whose own Third Symphony it shares both a key signature and an expansive sense of scale) – you'll start to hear and hopefully love Lyatoshinsky's own impassioned, hauntingly poetic voice.

The shape of the music, too, is similar to that of Shostakovich's symphonies, admits Karabits: 'And it needs to be shaped in the right way. I mean, it's a very big orchestra and it's very intense music, with powerful orchestration. It's exactly the same problem as with Walton's First, for example – you need to shape the work. If you don't do that, it becomes too big, too heavy, too loud. So the conductor needs to create something from those sounds that is understandable to the audience.' It's hard, I suggest, to think of any living conductor

who's better placed to serve as an interpreter (in every sense) of Lyatoshinsky's world. 'Yes,' agrees Karabits. 'I mean, growing up in Kiev I always heard his name at home, spoken with absolute respect and love. So I feel I'm just fulfilling something that

already belongs to me. It's very personal. But apart from that, I think he really is a great composer. And a composer needs an interpreter.'

Sometimes great music can be spoiled by a poor

interpretation – it's happened so many times in musical history. And I really feel that Lyatoshinsky needs good recordings and good performances in order to get where he needs to be, in terms of recognition and in terms of his presence in concert halls.'

Certainly, you're unlikely to hear the symphony better played than it is on Karabits's new Bournemouth recording.

Growing up, I heard Lyatoshinsky's name spoken with absolute respect – I'm fulfilling something that already belongs to me

KIRILL KARABITS



Karabits and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra record Lyatoshinsky's Third Symphony

'They understand the style, because we've done a lot of eastern European music,' says Karabits. 'They immediately knew what was needed. And it's an important element of the relationship, also, for the orchestra to feel that they are discovering something that they wouldn't have discovered with another conductor.' It surely says something about Karabits's 10 years in Poole that when he conducted the symphony's UK premiere there in January 2018 it was sold out. It's far too simplistic to assume that Bournemouth audiences – and those of many of the UK's underfunded and overworked regional orchestras – are innately conservative, and too easy to overlook the inspirational effect of a chief conductor who's made the effort to forge a bond.

'It's still a mystery to me how this orchestra survives, even after 10 years,' admits Karabits. 'There's a special connection to the local community. If the audience didn't support us the way they do, this orchestra would never be able to exist here. I can tell you that everyone who was here last night didn't just come because they wanted to wear a new suit, or show off. They came because they appreciate the new programmes that we are offering. Yes, of course, you have to have your Grieg Piano Concertos and Rachmaninov Seconds, and when I first came

here, I thought, "Well, this will be the place to practise mainstream repertoire." But it turned out that I was wrong.'

'We've done the *Turangalila-symphonie*, and Prokofiev No 2, and that's what people remember. They loved it. Shostakovich 14 – people were still talking about that after two years. They know that sometimes there are some crazy ideas with my unknown music, but they like it. They like to be challenged.' And for mainstream repertoire, Karabits has his position in Weimar, where since 2016 he's served as General Music Director of the Deutsches Nationaltheater und Staatskapelle Weimar. 'It's like I'm living a double life,' he says. 'They call the Weimar Staatskapelle a *Traditionsorchester*, the German critics; it's the oldest orchestra in Germany. Liszt, Wagner, Goethe and Schiller all lived in Weimar. I wanted to see what it would be like being a music director of both a theatre and an orchestra. It's been a really interesting experience for me.'

But even in Weimar – a city of around 65,000 that maintains a theatre and an orchestra of 110 full-time musicians – Karabits has been unable to resist pushing the envelope a bit. In August 2018 he conducted the world premiere of *Sardanapolo*, an unfinished opera by – of all people – Liszt. 'It's pure *bel canto*,' he says. 'It does immediately sound like Liszt, but it's absolutely in a Bellini kind of style.' A recording is due to be released on the Audite label next month. Exploration – and the process of bringing people together through shared discovery – is also a major part of Karabits's work with I, Culture, a youth orchestra made up of young musicians from a swathe of nations across the former Soviet Union as well as Poland and Hungary.

'After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a lot of cultural isolation. When I grew up, Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. So it is very difficult to separate parts of the shared culture, and say, "Well, that was yours and this is mine." This is what is happening, unfortunately, at the moment. But the players of I, Culture come from Armenia, they come from Azerbaijan, and the orchestra shows them that their culture actually matters. They understand that what they represent can actually be valued somewhere else. It helps them to feel part of



When choosing repertoire, Karabits believes it's important his players 'feel that they are discovering something that they wouldn't have discovered with another conductor'



Karabits: connected to his community

the European community. At the beginning, they're quite distanced, but then after partying and performing together, they become a team. And a youth orchestra is always exciting. There's no limit to what you can achieve with them.'

It's the same sense of mission that prompts Karabits to bring Lyatoshinsky to the Dorset coast – the idea that a sincere emotional connection can cross any boundaries. Chandos has

already released Karabits's Bournemouth disc of the Azerbaijani composer Kara Karayev; next up on his wishlist of 'crazy ideas' is the Third Symphony by the Armenian Avet Terterian, which, I point out, features a solo *duduk*. 'Two *duduks*!' Karabits corrects me. 'They'll never have heard anything like it, I can promise you.' You do start to wonder how he fits it all in; though it's clear that he feels a loyalty to the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra that's not a long way behind his devotion to his wife and two children (in Paris) and his extended family back in Kiev.

My eight-year-old son loves this orchestra; he loves the cello section so much that he demanded to play the cello himself

'It's a very crazy life. But it's an exciting life. I try as hard as I can to bring the family with me when I'm here, for example. They love coming here. My eight-year old son loves this orchestra – he knows many musicians personally and he loves the cello section so much that he demanded to play the cello himself. And in Weimar, he participated in a production of *Don Giovanni*! The director had the idea that Donna Anna had a child, who at the end becomes the Commendatore – my son just walked on stage eating a chicken! He loved it. So yes, I try to involve my family when I can.'

And it's easy to underestimate the charms of Poole itself, where Karabits has a flat on the quayside with a view of Brownsea Island, and relaxes with leisurely browses round Waitrose, country walks on the Isle of Purbeck or ('not as often as I'd like') fishing trips in Poole Harbour. And then he returns, refreshed, to an orchestra who always seem to have something more to offer him. The feeling appears to be mutual.

'The most important thing for me is that they are open-minded. That was something that struck me from the very first moment: they are eager to explore new sound worlds, and they take risks. Like every orchestra, they don't actually need a conductor in order to perform. But what I've found interesting is that, yes, they are very positive, but when you know how to inspire them, they give you even more. And it's not only about doing something, but developing that music, getting it into your system, not just playing and forgetting. You can really settle down and work and spend at least a week on developing the sound and style without losing that enthusiasm. It's about creating. Orchestras in many places would dream about this, but Bournemouth has it.'

► Read our review of Kirill Karabits's Lyatoshinsky recording on page 42

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GRAMOPHONE

Editor's Choice



Every issue, Gramophone's Editor's Choices highlight the most exciting and important new releases. Explore here a selection of the most thrilling music-making of the past year



THE GERSHWIN MOMENT

Kirill Gerstein *pft*
St Louis Symphony Orchestra / David Robertson Myrios
Kirill Gerstein's

famed virtuosity meets with his jazz background to produce a thrilling, hugely enjoyable and well thought-out celebration of Gershwin's music.

► REVIEWED IN MARCH 2018

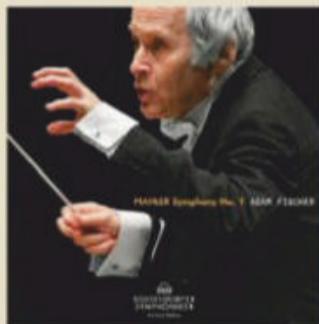


TCHAIKOVSKY

The Queen of Spades
Sols; Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Mariss Jansons
Stage dir: Stefan Herheim
Video dir: Misjel Vermeiren
C Major Entertainment
Tchaikovsky becomes a

central character in his own opera in this staging from Amsterdam, a 'terrific memento of a provocative but enthralling production', wrote critic Mark Pullinger.

► REVIEWED IN MARCH 2018

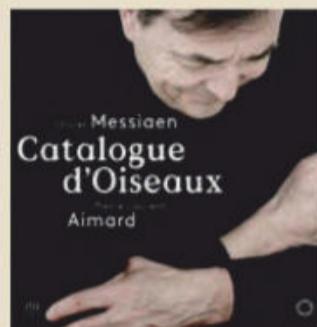


MAHLER

Symphony No 1
Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra / Adám Fischer
AVI-Music
There's a

palpable excitement from critic Edward Seckerson about this developing Mahler series, and justifiably so, the performances underpinned by an evident rapport between Fischer and his orchestra.

► REVIEWED IN APRIL 2018



MESSIAEN

Catalogue d'oiseaux
Pierre-Laurent Aimard *pft*

Pentatone
A fascinating work, the demands it makes on performer and listener both great but greatly rewarding, is brilliantly explored by a pianist with a deep knowledge of Messiaen's music.

► REVIEWED IN APRIL 2018



BARTÓK

Violin Concertos Nos 1 & 2
Christian Tetzlaff *vn*
Finnish Radio SO / Hannu Lintu
Ondine

From the fierce rhythms to the moments of great fragility, Christian Tetzlaff and Hannu Lintu take us on a thrilling journey through Bartók's two violin concertos.

► REVIEWED IN MAY 2018

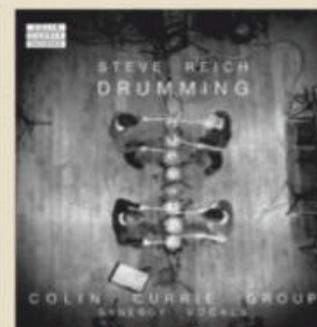


BEETHOVEN

Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 4
Royal Northern Sinfonia / Lars Vogt *pft*
Ondine

An enjoyable concerto cycle reaches its conclusion in considerable style – the rapport between Lars Vogt and his Northern Sinfonia feels natural and joyous after a rewarding journey.

► REVIEWED IN MAY 2018



REICH

Drumming
Synergy Vocals;
Colin Currie Group
Colin Currie Records
One of minimalism's most significant –

and most epic – works is given a mesmeric performance by Colin Currie and colleagues, who beautifully handle its rhythmic patterns and phasing.

► REVIEWED IN MAY 2018



BRAHMS. SCRIBABIN

'Norma Fisher at the BBC, Vol 1'
Norma Fisher *pft*
Sonetto Classics
Acclaimed today as a highly

sought-after teacher, it's now possible to hear on record the pianist Norma Fisher's great gifts as a performer thanks to this wonderful release.

► REVIEWED IN JULY 2018



MAHLER

Symphony No 5
Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra / Adám Fischer
AVI-Music
This very

fine Mahler symphony cycle continued in July with a recording of the Fifth Symphony that bore all the hallmarks we'd already witnessed from Adám Fischer of brilliant music-making.

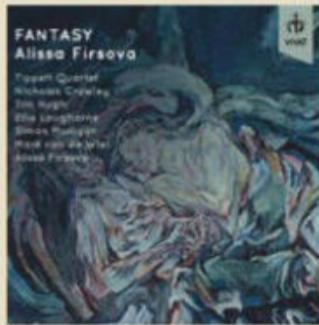
► REVIEWED IN JULY 2018



BIZET
Les pêcheurs
de perles
Soloists; Lille
National Orchestra
/ Alexandre Bloch
Pentatone
For all the fame

of its renowned duet, *The Pearl Fishers* hasn't been so well represented on record. This changes that, with a superb cast and brilliantly spirited playing throughout.

► REVIEWED IN AUGUST 2018



FIRSOVA
'Fantasy'
Soloists; Tippett
Quartet
Vivat
Beautifully
crafted works –
all of which

reveal an innate understanding of different instrumental voices – reflect a creative mind from which we look forward to hearing more.

► REVIEWED IN SEPTEMBER 2018



DECADES - A
CENTURY OF
SONG, VOL 3:
1830-1840
Soloists; Malcom
Martineau *pf*
Vivat
The Vivat

label's imaginative approach to exploring 19th-century song, a decade at a time, reaches the 1830s: nine composers, some rarities – and outstanding singing.

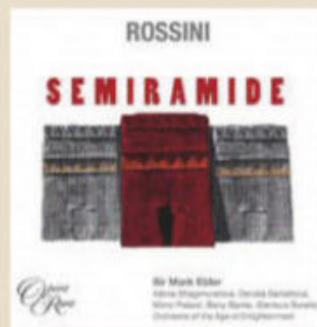
► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2018



GÁL.
SHOSTAKOVICH
Piano Trios
Briggs Piano Trio
Avie
This wonderful
album is another
beautifully

played addition to the Hans Gál catalogue, early 20th-century chamber music which charms and engages the listener throughout.

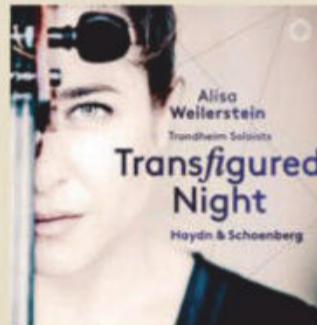
► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2018



ROSSINI
Semiramide
Sols; Opera Rara
Chorus; Orchestra
of the Age of
Enlightenment /
Sir Mark Elder
Opera Rara

A superb triumph for Opera Rara, a label whose championship of (often neglected) operas – in studio conditions – can't be commended highly enough.

► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2018



HAYDN
Cello Concertos
SCHOENBERG
Verklärte Nacht
Trondheim Soloists/
Alisa Weilerstein *vc*
Pentatone
The inspired

Alisa Weilerstein pulls off an unusual and illuminating pairing – but then as someone who has paired Elgar and Carter concertos, what do you expect?

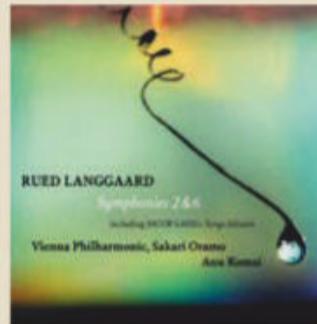
► REVIEWED IN OCTOBER 2018



STRAVINSKY
Perséphone
Sols; Finnish
National Opera
Orchestra /
Esa-Pekka Salonen
Pentatone
Esa-Pekka

Salonen's grasp of Stravinsky's score and control of the musical forces lends this recording a powerfully gripping sense of drama and drive.

► REVIEWED IN OCTOBER 2018



LANGGAARD
Symphonies Nos 2 & 6
GADE Tango jalouse
Vienna Philharmonic
Orchestra /
Sakari Oramo
Dacapo
Unfamiliar but

deeply rewarding music played by a great orchestra clearly relishing the opportunity to engage with this composer's fascinating sound world.

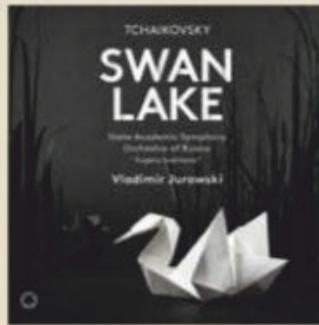
► REVIEWED IN NOVEMBER 2018



SCHUBERT
String Quartets
Nos 9 & 14 'Death
and the Maiden'
Chiaroscuro
Quartet
BIS

Two Schubert string quartets, early and 'late', played with enormous conviction, extraordinary emotional depth and power by this very stylish ensemble.

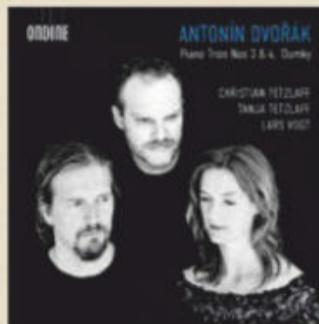
► REVIEWED IN NOVEMBER 2018



TCHAIKOVSKY
Swan Lake
State Academic
Symphony
Orchestra of Russia
'Evgeny Svetlanov'
/ Vladimir Jurowski
Pentatone

Familiar – and glorious – music given a fresh approach under Jurowski full of intriguing insights and, most of all, gripping playing.

► REVIEWED IN NOVEMBER 2018



DVOŘÁK
Piano Trios Nos 3 & 4
Christian Tetzlaff *vn*
Tanja Tetzlaff *vc*
Lars Vogt *pf*
Ondine
An exquisite
and entrancing

chamber music disc from three superb players, and an impressive example of the intimacy and interplay that the genre can embody at its most heightened.

► REVIEWED IN DECEMBER 2018



MESSIAEN
La Nativité du
Seigneur
Richard Gowers *org*
King's College,
Cambridge
From the work's
quiet beginnings

through to the magisterial final part, this is deeply impressive organ-playing, with Kings College's atmospheric sound expertly captured.

► REVIEWED IN DECEMBER 2018

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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Alexandra Coghlan welcomes John Eliot Gardiner's return to Monteverdi with a triumphant account of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*



Monteverdi

Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria

Furio Zanasi	bar.	Ulisce
Lucile Richardot	mez.	Penelope
Krystian Adam	ten.	Telemaco
Hana Blažíková	sop.	Minerva/Fortuna
Gianluca Buratto	bass	Tempo/Nettuno/Antinoo
Michał Czerniawski	counterten.	Pisandro
Gareth Treseder	ten.	Anfinomo
Zachary Wilder	ten.	Eurimaco
Anna Dennis	sop.	Melanto
John Taylor Ward	bass-bar	Giove
Francesca Boncompagni	sop.	Giunone
Robert Burt	ten.	Iro
Francisco Fernández-Rueda	ten.	Eumete
Carlo Vistoli	counterten.	Umana Fragilità
Silvia Frigato	sop.	Amore
Francesca Biliotti	contr.	Ericlea
Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists /		
John Eliot Gardiner		

SDG M ③ SDG730 (3h 5' • DDD)

Recorded live at The National Forum of Music, Wrocław, Poland, September 7-9, 2017
Includes libretto and translation

John Eliot Gardiner's recordings of *Orfeo* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* both stretch back several decades but it has taken until now for the conductor to tackle the composer's great paean to married love, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. The result is both the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new era, clearly related to Gardiner's earlier accounts but refined and refashioned for another age and audience.

Monteverdi's 450th anniversary gave us a year of musical celebration but no tribute was more elaborate than that by Gardiner, who assembled a hand-picked ensemble of soloists to tour the composer's three surviving



Where Gardiner's performance comes into its own is in its ability to absorb extremes into a coherent whole'

operas internationally over the course of more than six months with his Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists. In the concert hall these semi-stagings were arresting experiences with the orchestra at their heart, the drama emerging organically from the close relationship between singers and



Strong ensemble cast: Francisco Fernández-Rueda (left) and Furio Zanasi

ensemble rather than relying on any elaborate staging.

It's an approach that lends itself naturally to disc, and this account (recorded live towards the end of the tour in Wrocław) has an appealing energy and ease. Recitatives flicker and spark with detail, the repartee of the court, the blandishments of the young lovers, the pronouncements of the gods and the halting reconciliation between husband and wife each coloured distinctly. Instrumental textures are spare and speeds swift, and there's a welcome sense of narrative drive through a story that lacks the easy sensation of *Poppea* or the episodic structure of *Orfeo*.

It's a commonplace to point to the Shakespearean quality of *Ulisse*, but the opera's broad dramatic lens – its colliding of high and low, of broad comedy and finely drawn psychology – and its back-and-forth, text-driven drama is truly that of a sung play. Where Gardiner's performance comes into its own is in its ability to absorb these extremes into a coherent whole. Text is king, but it's the rhetoric of the English Baroque Soloists that really counts:

sensitive to every inference and shift of mood, it's their instrumental inflections and colouring that fills out the silhouette of the sung drama. The shy beauty of the recorders that support Penelope's timid closing attempt at aria (compared to the forthright exuberance of those that accompany the reunion of Ulisse and Eumete), the frothy, suddenly self-conscious detail of the realisations that accompany the suitors, the crisp authority of the strings that support Minerva's pronouncements – all are part of a single, richly drawn world.



Gardiner's recording benefits from the close relationship between the singers, which enables the drama to emerge organically

Furio Zanasi is a smooth, patrician Ulisse, scarcely convincing as a beggar but revealing unexpected ferocity in the conflict of the court. Set alongside Lucille Richardot's handsome, masculine Penelope the effect is interesting – of a woman hardened, dried up, by her isolation in a man's world, and a war-ravaged man who must coax her once again into softness. Compared to the glowing severity of Christine Rice with Les Arts Florissants, or Bernarda Fink under René Jacobs (both Harmonia Mundi), vocally pliant even at her coolest dramatically, Richardot is markedly less lovely, thawing only slightly in her final release into aria – the only slight weakness in an otherwise strong ensemble cast.

Hana Blažíková is a radiant Minerva, while Gianluca Buratto brings charred blackness and depth to Nettuno and suitor Antinoo. Anna Dennis is all warm sensuality as Melanto, though her pairing with Zachary Wilder's Eurimaco sounds almost too beautiful, too poetic for these earthiest of lovers. There's a pleasing simplicity to Francisco Fernández-Rueda's

Eume, and the scene with Zanasi's newly revealed Ulisse that closes Act 1 is one of the most touching moments of this account – a last breath of outdoor innocence before we find ourselves trapped in the fetid intimacy and affectation of the court.

Iro can be a problem on disc. The vocal burlesque and caricature needed to propel the glutton's scenes on stage can jar in the inevitably music-privileging context of a recording. There's plenty of the grotesque to Robert Burt's performance. Wheedling, whining and storming his way through his Act 3 lament, he's an uncompromising figure, but never less (or more) than human – pitiable, rather than horrifying even at his blustering extremes.

All the old dramatic clarity of Gardiner's Monteverdi accounts are here but it's as if the camera has zoomed in. For the first time we hear husk and breath as well as melody, our ears drawn constantly to the subtlest detail of instrumental shading or vocal colour. There's a sense of exhilaration, of risk, to this musical

proximity. Standing inches from a musical oil painting, you can suddenly pick out the brush strokes that energise the whole. There are more classically beautiful accounts of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* available, but perhaps none with quite so much life. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Harriet Smith finds much to enjoy in Seong-Jin Cho's Mozart: 'He couldn't wish for a more empathetic conductor in the D minor Concerto than Yannick Nézet-Séguin' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**



Andrew Farach-Colton listens to Saint-Saëns from Utah: 'There's tremendous rhythmic vitality and verve, while the finale has muscle and bite as well as glory and grandeur' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**

JS Bach

Six Brandenburg Concertos, BWV1046-1051

Concerto Copenhagen / Lars Ulrik Mortensen

CPO F ② CPO555 158-2 (94' • DDD/DSD)



The tone of Concerto Copenhagen's *Brandenburgs* is set right at the beginning of Concerto No 1, where the usual raucous trampling by the horns is tamed and tucked neatly into a texture that is light, suave and comfortable. It is followed by a slow movement that tumbles loosely and wistfully like autumn leaves, a third that swings unhurriedly to arrive on its final chord with a good-natured blast, and a svelte and smooth finale. If the recent recording by Zefiro (Arcana, 11/18) has the sort of joyous energy that can pick you up in the morning, this is one to settle down to in the fading light of afternoon. Free of bombast and happy to linger on finely turned detail, it is altogether a different pleasure.

And so it goes throughout the entire set. No 2 is similarly nonchalant, giving time to enjoy the various colours of the four soloists, led by superb trumpet-playing from Robert Farley. The texture is wonderfully lucid here, and continues to be so in the second movement, aided by Lars Ulrik Mortensen's choice of the buff stop for his lightly trickling continuo. No 3, going somewhat against the modern trend, is measured, favouring flow and gentle undulation over speed and nagging rhythmic accentuation. Mortensen's rippling harpsichord flourish for the 'second' movement makes a pleasing change from the usual violin.

Concerto No 4 is again a display of cleanliness and clarity, with the fugal strands of the finale in particular often singing out proudly, especially at the beginning. The normally steady approach to tempo is spoiled a little here, however, by what sound like slightly incompatible takes at places, while things are also

possibly a bit too relaxed towards the end, where I miss the grand climactic swell of the last fugal *tutti*. Sweetly shaped violin-playing by Fredrik From, the reliably liquid fluting of Katy Bircher and typically controlled keyboard brilliance of Mortensen himself (who, like Francesco Corti in the Zefiro recording, can't quite bring himself to submit to normal continuo subservience after his first-movement cadenza) characterise Concerto No 5, which also benefits from an uncommonly mellow and moving slow movement. And in No 6 it comes as no surprise by now to hear Concerto Copenhagen drawing out its sometimes murky texture to uncover the intricate beauties within.

This, then, is not a *Brandenburg* set of the hard-hitting, exuberant kind, but one which just holds things back enough to reveal the music's wealth of musical detail, as well as the refined musicality of its players. There is, of course, room for both approaches. **Lindsay Kemp**

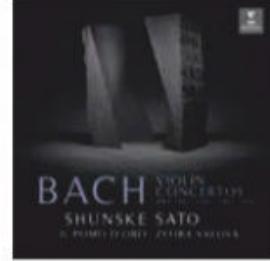
JS Bach

Violin Concertos - BWV1041; BWV1042;

BWV1056R. Double Concerto, BWV1043^a

Shunske Sato, ^aZefira Valova vns Il Pomo d'Oro

Erato F 9029 56338-7 (52' • DDD)



It was never going to be a complete surprise to find these four concertos to be an exquisitely joyous and exciting listen, when on the ticket we have Concerto Köln's concertmaster Shunske Sato and the always sparkling Il Pomo d'Oro. Still, the degree of exquisitely joyful listening has nevertheless completely bowled me over.

So much so, in fact, that it feels a little mundane to begin with talk of tempos. However, in the context of the many steeplechase interpretations of this repertoire out there, it is worth stating at the outset that this is not one of those. By contrast, all the speeds here just feel

right: un hurried, but equally brimming with energy and flow.

What really makes this recording one to treasure, though, is the degree of uncontrived personality and artistry on display. Subtle rubato is a major factor in this: playful mini-tugs that catch and tease the ear without ever interfering with the momentum. Less subtle but equally spot-on touches then include the moment in the final *Allegro assai* of the E major Concerto (BWV1042) when, at 1'13", Sato suddenly digs deeper into his instrument, tipping over what was already lithely dancing energy into a full-on barn-dance stomp.

Another point I can't shout loudly enough about is the exceptional blending. In fact sometimes you almost lose track of who is who, whether it's Sato and the Il Pomo d'Oro violins tonally weaving in and out of each other in the *Allegro assai* of the A minor Concerto (BWV1041) or Sato and Valova's duetting throughout the Double Concerto. Everyone is listening to and revelling in their musical colleagues, to the extent that hierarchies are deliciously blurred. Sticking with the Double, its central *Largo* is a stunner: clean, poised, measured, but also highly romantic.

Then there's the glow to the overall sound, and its little timbral presents such as, in the *Largo* of the G minor Concerto (BWV1056R), the gentle luminosity of the pizzicato strings and the delicate harpsichord droplets supporting Sato's song above. Have I sold it enough? I hope so. Because really, this is properly heavenly.

Charlotte Gardner

Beethoven • R Strauss

Beethoven Symphony No 3, 'Eroica', Op 55^a

R Strauss Horn Concerto No 1, Op 11^b

William Caballero hn Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck

Reference Recordings F ② FR728SACD

(65' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts, Pittsburgh, ^bSeptember 22-24, 2012;

^aOctober 27-29, 2017



Strongly characterised: Manfred Honeck directs the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in a powerful live account of Beethoven's *Eroica*



Reading Manfred Honeck's extensive booklet note (nearly 10 single-spaced pages on the *Eroica* alone) before playing the CD left me slightly apprehensive. His historical and analytical observations are persuasive but his disclosure of the many details he sought to spotlight – here adding 'subtle accents' to elucidate a 'hidden' figure in the violins, or there taking time to 'bring out the different characters and expression' in an unusual harmonic progression – gave a suggestion of interpretative fussiness.

I needn't have worried. There's nothing even remotely studied about Honeck's performance, unless one counts a tendency to anticipate sudden changes in dynamics. He pays unusual attention to detail, yes – note straight away the gently blossoming (and unmarked) crescendo on the ascending E flat major triad of the opening theme – but this never inhibits the music's momentum or trajectory. The first movement is powerfully propulsive, in fact, with the full complement of Pittsburgh's strings sounding as lithe as a chamber orchestra. Listen, say, to the springy accents at 0'27" or to the remarkable

clarity and inexorable drive in the dizzying motivic tangle starting at 9'17".

In the *Marcia funebre*, Honeck plays with chiaroscuro, painting the opening with dusky, febrile string tone and then gradually lifting the shadows in the *maggior* segment while also allowing the musicians greater freedom to expressively limn their phrases. Indeed, the interpretation is strongly characterised from first note to last, with a particularly rambunctious and eventful Scherzo and finale – savour the earthy rhythms in the latter's Hungarian *verbunkos* variation at 3'52", for example, or the exultant, rustic rasp of horns in the Scherzo's Trio.

William Caballero, Pittsburgh's principal horn, shines in so many of the *Eroica*'s most memorable passages that it's no wonder Reference chose to fill out the disc with a brilliant account of Strauss's First Concerto. Caballero has a more outdoorsy tone than Dennis Brain, whose 1947 recording with Alceo Galliera retains its power to astonish (EMI, 10/92), although this new version offers marvels of its own, from the long, arching phrases Caballero lavishes on lyrical passages to the Mendelssohnian playfulness he brings to the finale. Although taken from concerts five years apart, both works are vividly recorded. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Beethoven

Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125

Regula Mühlemann sop Marie-Claude Chappuis

mez Maximilian Schmitt ten Thomas E Bauer bass

Wrocław Philharmonic Choir; Basel Chamber

Orchestra / Giovanni Antonini

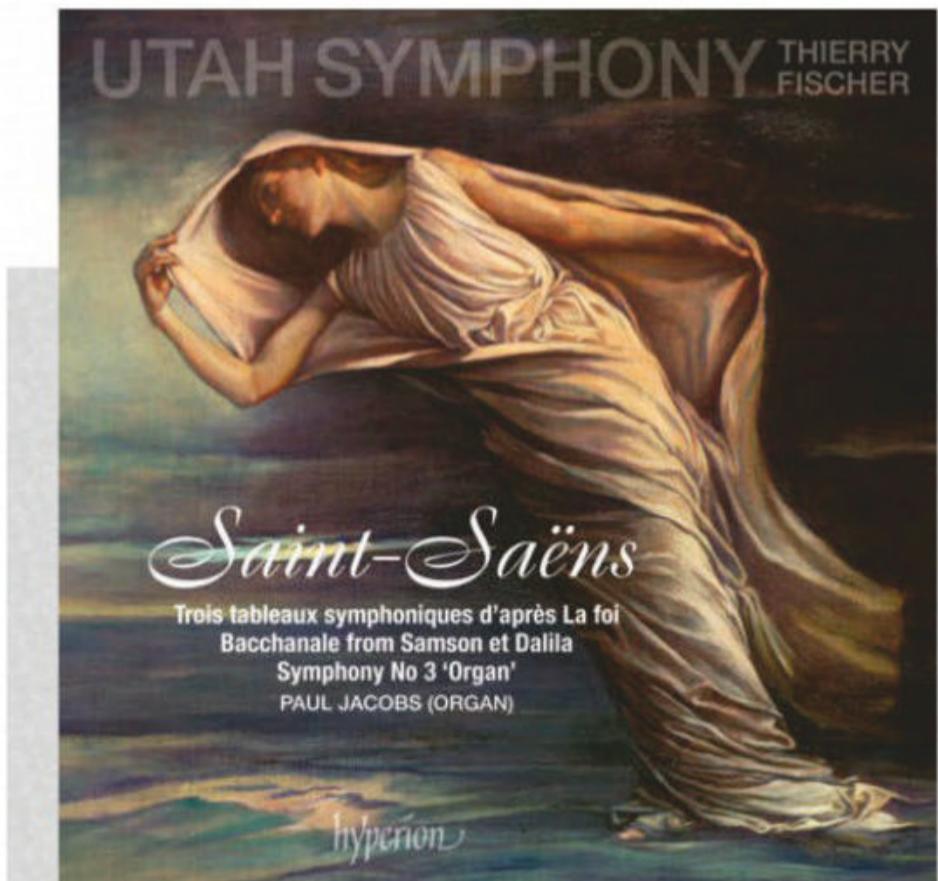
Sony Classical F 19075 87096-2 (61' • DDD)



Back in September 2010 I remarked how the Fifth and Sixth symphonies 'really swing' under Giovanni Antonini, and now his long-gestated and unsung Beethoven cycle culminates in a properly explosive, rhythmically charged Ninth. He makes exhilarating, chaotic sense of the first movement at the prescribed but dangerously precipitate metronome mark like only a handful on record – Leibowitz and Scherchen in the '60s, more recently Zinman in Zurich and Norrington in Stuttgart. Unrelenting momentum in the first half of this Ninth draws it closer than most to the C minor Fifth as well as to the E flat major Quartet, Op 127, completed a year later.

Antonini grasps that profound feeling can't be sought or summoned in this music. It arrives how it will, and it does so at

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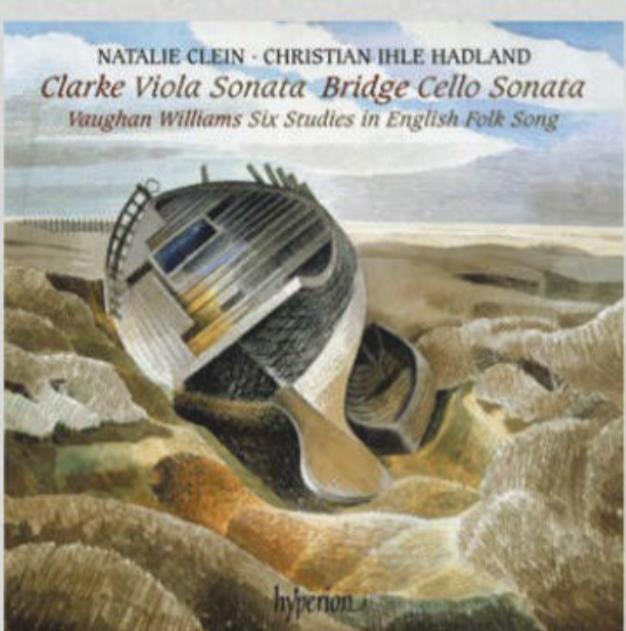
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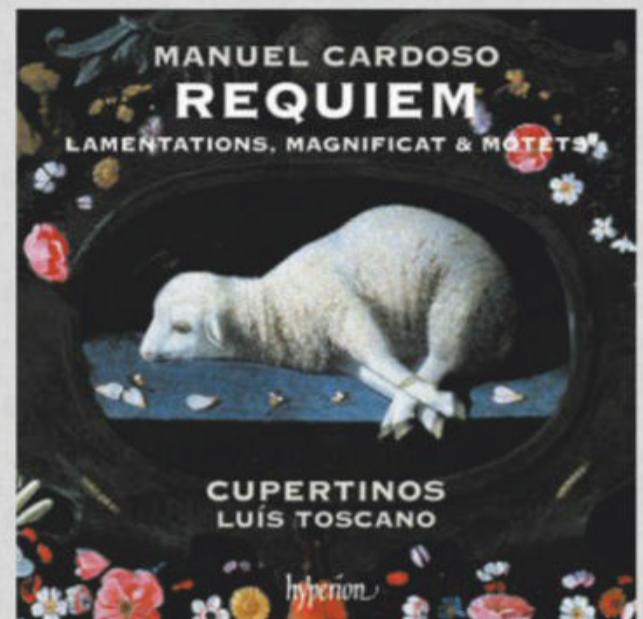
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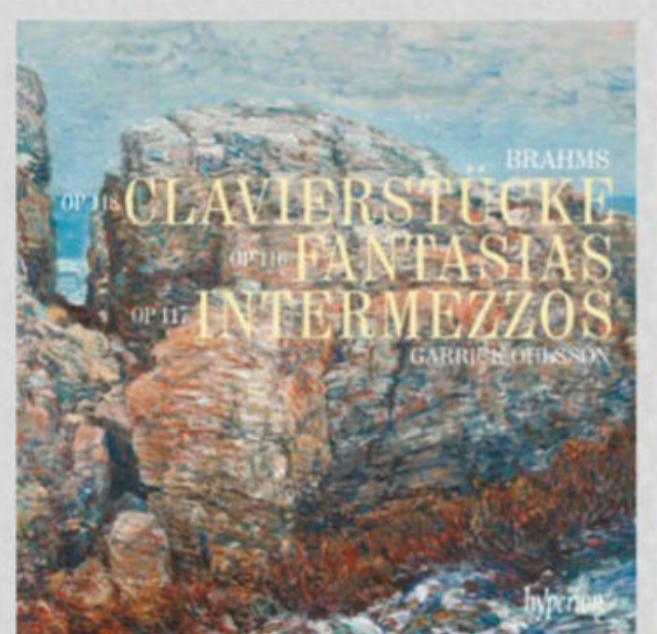
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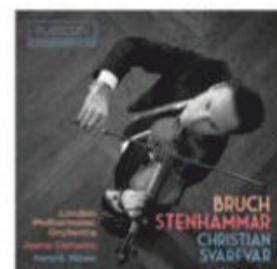
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length in an unforced, achingly beautiful account of the slow movement – perhaps one with less contrast made than some between the hymnlike first subject and the songlike second, but unified by tonally matched ensembles of wind and strings that listen to each other.

Beethoven instructs the finale's opening cello soliloquies to proceed like a recitative *but in tempo* (his emphasis): an adjuration that becomes reasonable and even logical when the recollections of previous movements are also played at the speeds he had in mind. The 'joy' theme then emerges on the Basel strings shyly at first, yet soon blossoming with a pride that resists any post-Adornian attempt to ironise or distance us from it. The vocal soloists and chorus are all of a piece with Antonini's conception and execution, consistently stylish and alert – and, yes, they sing with swing. If you're in the market for a Ninth full of surprise and delight rather than soulful yearning or triumphalist breast-beating, look no further. **Peter Quantrill**

Bruch · Stenhammar

Bruch Violin Concerto No 1, Op 26^a
Stenhammar Two Sentimental Romances, Op 28^a. Violin Sonata, Op 19^b
Christian Svarfvar vn ^b**Henrik Måwe** pf
^a**London Philharmonic Orchestra / Joana Carneiro**
 Rubicon (RCD1033 (66' • DDD)



Christian Svarfvar muses poetically over the opening solo of the Bruch Concerto. He's hardly alone in disregarding the composer's instruction to begin at a solid *forte* – many violinists take the same liberty – and his dreamy approach is mesmeric, in any case. His tone gleams, and the way he tugs yearningly on the leading tones draws one in. The trouble is that he never quite shakes off the feeling of poetic languor. It's possible to make this movement work at a broad tempo, as Daniel Hope demonstrates (DG, 5/11). But where Hope is elastic in his phrasing, Svarfvar is metrically rigid, and the heavy tread quickly becomes wearying.

The *Adagio*, also taken at a relatively slow tempo, fares better. Svarfvar's playing radiates tenderness and the surprise shift in tonality at 4'45" is beautifully managed by Joana Carneiro and the LPO. Alas, the *Allegro energico* finale is seriously lacking in verve. Bruch marks it two beats to the bar but here it's played in four, so instead of snap and swing, one feels every beat – even the *stringendo* passages are listless.

I'm guessing that Svarfvar favours leisurely tempos, as the pair of Stenhammar works (recorded in different sessions) are similarly sedate. Thankfully, he's more flexible in his phrasing here – pianist Henrik Måwe's pellucid, supple playing helps enormously – although in the Sonata the musicians' emphasis on pastoral lyricism comes largely at the expense of ardour. The Skride sisters find a happier balance (Orfeo, 10/16). Svarfvar's album concludes on a high note, at least, with charmingly intimate readings of the two *Sentimental Romances*. His hushed tone in the opening of the first suggests a lullaby – a lovely touch – and the second sighs and sobs with charming restraint.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Cutler

'Elsewhereness'

Akhmatova Fragments^a. Elsewhereness^b. For Frederic Lagnau^c. Karembeu's Guide to the Complete Defensive Midfielder^d. McNulty^e. Sikorski B^f
^a**Sarah Leonard** sop ^d**Iain Ballamy** sax ^e**Fidelio Trio**; ^b**Emulsion Sinfonietta**; ^c**Noszferatu**; ^a**Project Instrumental / Daniele Rosina**; ^c**Workers Union Ensemble**; ^b**Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra / Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla**
 NMC (NMCD246 (60' • DDD)



Following his arresting debut 'Bartlebooth' (9/08) and the 'Drempel' miscellany as co-director of Noszferatu (1/11), 'Elsewhereness' is Joe Cutler's second NMC release devoted to his music and features a no less distinctive or appealing cross-section of pieces from the past decade.

Written for the opening of the new Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (where he is Head of Composition), the title-track evokes the dismantling of the old then erecting of the new with that mingling of affirmation and ambivalence at which Cutler is so adept. It audibly pervades the content of *McNulty*, alluding to a character from the TV series *The Wire* through a workout on Irish traditional music where the constituents of the piano trio become characters in this increasingly ominous mini-drama. Stealthier and more understated, *For Frederic Lagnau* is a tribute to a departed colleague whose pathos is shot through with acutely delineated irony.

Cutler's forays into word-setting are significant for all their infrequency. In *Akhmatova Fragments*, a coursing instrumental processional leads into three

pungent miniatures, prior to the relatively extended 'Summer Garden' whose rare pathos is the more affecting for its ethereal rapture being so deftly conveyed by Sarah Leonard. *Sikorski B* offers a further remembrance of the Polish composer, made the more visceral through a disjunctive transition from meditative reverie to anguished threnody which is fatefully halted *in medias res*. Finally to *Karembeu's Guide*, 'total football' as translated into a stylistic hybrid that encompasses jazzy humour and hymnic eloquence on its way to the queasiest among Cutlerian resolutions.

This is finely played by Emulsion Sinfonietta – as are all these works – never glossing over textural intricacies and confirming the regard in which Cutler is held. For those yet to hear the earlier discs, 'Elsewhereness' proves a no less enticing entry into his inimitable sound world.

Richard Whitehouse

Elgar · Finzi

Elgar Violin Concerto, Op 61

Finzi Violin Concerto

Ning Feng vn **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Carlos Miguel Prieto**

Channel Classics (CCS40218 (71' • DDD)



The way Ning Feng shapes the opening phrases of the Elgar Concerto, I'm fairly certain he's given careful study to Yehudi Menuhin's fabled 1932 recording with the composer conducting (EMI, 11/89). Even Feng's lightly throbbing tone seems closely modelled on Menuhin's. As the movement progresses, however, it becomes clear that Feng's performance, while technically brilliant, operates within a significantly narrower emotional band. Take the lovely 'Windflower' theme at 6'24", which Feng plays rather slowly and very prettily but without even a hint of the passion and touching vulnerability Menuhin or Campoli (Decca, 5/18) bring to it.

Vulnerability is an essential element in this concerto, and its lack here is perhaps most glaring in passages Elgar marks *dolcissimo*, as at 6'14" in the *Andante*, and especially in the exquisitely tender phrase at 6'42", where Elgar writes *dolcissimo* a second time, just to make sure. As always, Feng's tone is beautiful, but it needs to be more than just that.

I also wish he and conductor Carlos Miguel Prieto had studied Elgar's flexible pacing and the nervous energy it generates, as their interpretation is simply far too

comfortable. Even the *nobilmente* section in the finale (at 8'40") needs more urgency. Then, in the cadenza, Feng's interpretation suddenly snaps into focus. He plays it ardently, evoking a rapt atmosphere that stands out from this otherwise overly sedate interpretation.

I very much like the delicate, tightly focused sound Feng brings to Finzi's early Violin Concerto, but this music requires a bit more intervention than he and Prieto provide, particularly in the meandering outer movements. Tasmin Little and Richard Hickox (Chandos, 5/01), at slightly slower tempos, dig deeper and find some much-needed grit; Feng seems to hover dreamily over the music's surface.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Elgar

The Wand of Youth - Suite No 1, Op 1a; Suite

No 2, Op 1b. Chanson de nuit, Op 15 No 1.

Nursery Suite. Salut d'amour, Op 12

Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder

Hallé F CDHLL7548 (71' • DDD)



Childhood, that most enduring of Victorian inventions, played an important role in

Elgar's life as a composer. We find it in the exquisite orchestral miniatures *Dream Children*, Op 43, which Elgar produced in 1902, the two *Wand of Youth* suites of 1907 and 1908, the charming children's fantasy *The Starlight Express*, Op 78 (1915), and the *Nursery Suite* (1930). Elgar's three suites, which are the principal focus of this recording, also remind us of his indebtedness to the precedent of the French orchestral suite, a form highly prevalent in the Parisian Lamoureux and Colonne concerts and famous for such composers as Bizet (especially *Jeux d'enfants*), Saint-Saëns, Massenet and Chabrier with their glittering examples of colourful orchestration.

In the *Wand of Youth* suites, played here with great delicacy by the Hallé under Mark Elder's affectionate and careful direction, there is no shortage of orchestral invention. We also experience more unusually that curious chemistry of youthful ideas (many of them dating from the late 1860s, the 1870s and early 1880s, well before the onset of Elgar's public career) cast in the adult clothing of the mature composer. It was an impression he clearly wanted to relate by assigning 'Op 1' to both suites. Many of the simple melodies are deeply affecting – the beautiful 'Serenade', the second subject of 'The Little Bells' (which turns up in *The*

Starlight Express), 'Fairies and Giants' and the delicious modality of 'The Tame Bears'. Elgar's scoring, too, seems to hark back to that more mellifluous instrumentation of the *Enigma Variations* in such movements as 'Moths and Butterflies', the evocative 'Slumber Scene' and the more Sullivanesque 'March'. Just occasionally the 50-year-old composer intrudes with the more advanced harmony at the end of 'The Wild Bears', but Elgarian thumbprints are everywhere to be seen, especially in the prevalence of Elgar's two- and three-part contrapuntal models and his love of the countertheme.

The later *Nursery Suite*, written for the two royal princesses, is also full of nostalgic reverie interspersed with movements of a more boisterous nature such as the compelling ostinato of 'The Wagon (Passes)'. 'Aubade' is enchantingly wistful, the gentle caprice of the flute solo in 'The Serious Doll' is tenderly poised, as is the dreamy portrayal of 'The Sad Doll', but there is something deeply personal about 'Envoy' which, with its violin cadenza (sensitively imparted by Lyn Fletcher) and thematic memories from the rest of the suite, embody more adult emotions of valediction. The inclusion of the orchestral version of *Salut d'amour* and *Chanson de nuit* from the first phase of Elgar's career are also a bonus. A must for all Elgar lovers!

Jeremy Dibble

Eller

Violin Concerto^a. Symphony No 2.

Fantasy^a. Symphonic Legend

^aBaiba Skride vn Estonian National

Symphony Orchestra / Olari Elts

Ondine F ODE1321-2 (68' • DDD)



We've had slices of atmospheric Heino Eller from Neeme Järvi and Tõnu Kaljuste before (and Toccata's survey of the composer's piano music continues) but nothing quite as meaty as this. It's convenient to describe Eller as Estonia's Sibelius, as the booklet does, but while there's no doubting he was central to the formation of the country's modern music life, the comparison is more troubling in terms of national identity and recent history. Arvo Pärt's music arguably speaks more individually and distinctively of the Estonian experience while being transmuted into something truly universal. Eller's works are embedded in the sound of a country that identifies itself in song while

Pärt was the duty producer at broadcaster ERR when Heino Eller's 1937 Violin Concerto was premiered (and broadcast) in Tallinn in 1965. An off-air recording did the rounds in the 2000s (Vladimir Alumäe under Järvi) but this newcomer has been worth waiting for, and sees the Latvian violinist Baiba Skride find levels of grit, determination and bravura we don't normally associate with her and her sweet-toned Stradivarius. That is precisely what this changeable, expressionist, heart-on-sleeve concerto demands (it was the first such work from the pen of an Estonian). If there's the slight feeling of a disingenuous smile leering through the *Allegro vivo* coda, the suggestive colon with which the piece stops casts that jollity in a new light. In the Fantasy for violin and orchestra (1916) Skride shows us that her sweet lyricism is still fully operational.

The main course is Eller's *Symphonic Legend* (1923/38), a fantastical tone poem packed with event when it isn't mustering itself ghoulishly. It slips and slides through the chromatic scale and is peppered with goblin-esque solos. Thrills come thick and fast in this rewarding score and the hard-edged but soulful sound of Elts's ENSO underlines them all (the trumpets enjoy it particularly).

There is Wagner, Scriabin and Strauss in the mix, and it's tempting to align Eller's sound with Enescu's. It's good to hear the plush *Legend* against the more austere Symphony No 2. All that survives of the work is a fertile torso, abandoned after it became clear the Soviet authorities wouldn't accept such severity. It is more than a tantalising suggestion of what might have been, with its distinctive rhythmic shimmery and grinding harmonies. Whether a true nationalist or not, Eller was some composer and this is a perfect introduction to him for those keen to look beyond the famous mood pieces.

Andrew Mellor

Goldmark

'Symphonic Poems, Vol 1'

Overtures - Penthesilea, Op 31; Sakuntala, Op 13;

Sappho, Op 44. Scherzos - Op 19; Op 45

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Fabrice Bollon

CPO F CPO555 160-2 (70' • DDD)



Karl Goldmark seems to be having a bit of a moment right now, and so too – to judge from this disc of Goldmark's orchestral music, so soon on the heels of his Gramophone Award-nominated account



Grit, determination and bravura: Baiba Skride joins the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and Olari Elts in Heino Eller's Violin Concerto

of Goldmark's opera *Die Königin von Saba* – does Fabrice Bollon. It's rare enough to encounter a second-rank 19th-century Austro-German composer who doesn't on some level resemble watered-down Mendelssohn, Schumann or Liszt. But Goldmark is the real thing, and so are Bollon's performances.

There are parallels to be drawn, for sure – notably with Liszt's conception of instrumental storytelling – but the musical language here has a personality that's strong enough to assert itself, and it's thoroughly enjoyable. Start with the final track here, the Scherzo, Op 45 – possibly, suggest the comprehensive booklet notes, a movement from an abandoned symphony. Bollon and his players sweep it forwards with swashbuckling verve: crisp, chattering woodwinds, glowing horns and string-playing of considerable warmth and *Schwung*.

That same enthusiasm, understanding and collective virtuosity brings the three large-scale overtures vividly to life. Bollon and his players audibly enjoy the languorous love-scene in *Penthesilea*, the sinuous woodwind melodies of *Sakuntala* and the headlong denouement of *Sappho*. If other hands might perhaps have let these large-scale, multi-sectioned works sag,

Bollon keeps them as taut as a bowstring. The two scherzos make delicious encores (and would be perfect material for a 'guess the composer' quiz).

These are really enjoyable, committed readings of some genuinely attractive and imaginative music; and, encouragingly, the disc is labelled Vol 1 – encouragingly because CPO have captured them in warm, lifelike sound. Go on, try it – you'll like it.

Richard Bratby

Haydn · Mozart

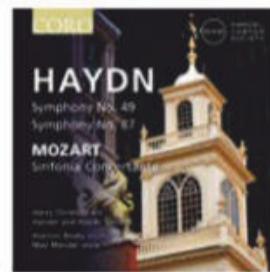
**Haydn Symphonies - No 49, 'La Passione'; No 87
Mozart Sinfonia concertante, K364^a**

^aAisslinn Nosky vn ^aMax Mandel va

Handel and Haydn Society / Harry Christophers

Coro © COR16168 (79' • DDD)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston,
January 26 & 28, 2018



With this recording of Haydn's Symphony No 87 (1785), Harry Christophers and his Boston band are now five-sixths of the way through their survey of the 'Paris' Symphonies, with only *La Reine* (No 85) still to go. Along with No 84 it's the least-

performed of the six, perhaps because it lacks a punchy nickname or the trumpet-and-timpani brilliance of some of the other works in the set. That's to do it a disservice, however, as it's as tautly wrought as any of Haydn's mature symphonies, the high horns providing sonic brilliance in lieu of trumpets. The *Adagio* is a hymnlike being that showcases Boston's wonderful woodwind soloists, while the rustic *Minuet* provides a characteristically Haydnesque contrast with the nervy, monothematic finale. Top marks for a full quota of repeats and a namecheck for oboist Debra Nagy for a delightfully cheeky turn in the *Trio*.

Symphony No 49, *La Passione*, perhaps enjoys more individual fame than No 87. Dating from almost two decades earlier, it's cast in the most austere *Sturm und Drang*, barely leaving the orbit of dark F minor except for a moment of major-key relief in the *Trio*, once again with prominent horns rising to the top of the register. The *Adagio* comes first, setting the scene for an angry *Allegro di molto*, which sizzles with a fury that is only topped by Giovanni Antonini on the disc that recently launched his cycle – but then, the 'H+H' and Il Giardino Armonico are very different ensembles, even if they are fairly evenly matched in the seething finale.

Concertmaster Aisslinn Nosky returns as soloist between the symphonies in Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante*, joined from the ranks by viola player Max Mandel, who very nearly outdoes her in the charisma of his playing. The programming is thought-provoking, once again pitting Haydn, the earthy intellectual, against his younger contemporary, the sophisticated and well-travelled *savant*. Allow for the merest audience rustle and the occasional hint of an ensemble fluff – all but unavoidable in concert – and Christophers once again demonstrates that his 203-year-old band are in rude health.

David Threasher

Symphony No 49 – selected comparison:

Giardino Armonico, Antonini (3/15) (ALPH) ALPHA670

Lyatoshynsky



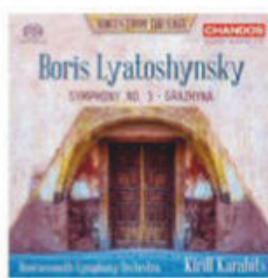
Symphony No 3, 'Peace Shall Defeat War', Op 50.

Grazhyna, Op 58

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra /

Kirill Karabits

Chandos (F) CHSA5233 (63' • DDD/DSD)



Boris Lyatoshynsky (1895–1968) was a slightly older Ukrainian

contemporary of Shostakovich, a pupil of Glière. His work was initially very much influenced by Russian late Romanticism but he came increasingly to employ Ukrainian folk song in his music. While his output is not exactly unknown (there are, for example, three other recordings of this symphony to my knowledge, two Ukrainian and one Russian, under Mravinsky), it has also not had the success of Shostakovich with Western audiences. This excellent recording may do something to change that.

The Third Symphony, written in 1951, bears a subtitle, *Peace Shall Defeat War*, and is dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the October Revolution. The music is in consequence frequently bellicose in character but Lyatoshynsky has a very personal lyrical vein which is quite different from that of his more famous contemporary: while one can make parallels with Shostakovich in the combative first movement, the glistening opening of the second is something quite different and original. Karabits and his Bournemouth players really bring out the detail of Lyatoshynsky's imaginative orchestration, and what might seem in other hands a somewhat sprawling work is here given a carefully shaped rendition of great intensity; the final minutes, in which the

Ukrainian folk song first heard in the opening movement is brought resoundingly back amid brass and bells, represent a genuinely heartfelt victory. Andrew Burn, in his excellent booklet notes, explains that this is the original version of the finale, the work having for many years been performed with a revised version more congenial to the Soviet authorities.

Grazhyna is a tone poem, written four years after the Third Symphony for the centenary of the death of Adam Mickiewicz, and it takes the writer's narrative poem 'Grazhyna' as its basis. The music is much more romantic in tone than the symphony but that is to be expected given the nature of Mickiewicz's tale of doomed love – it is very pictorial music indeed. The players of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra react to it with vigour and dedication, and their performances benefit from outstanding engineering. More Lyatoshynsky, please!

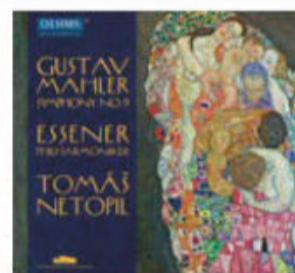
Ivan Moody

Mahler

Symphony No 9

Essen Philharmonic Orchestra / Tomáš Netopil

Oehms (F) OC1890 (83' • DDD)



'Very good' with reservations, was Rob Cowan's verdict (6/17) on the Essener Philharmoniker's *Asrael* under its director since 2013, Tomáš Netopil. The orchestra has a more established Mahlerian heritage, having given the premiere of the Sixth in 1906. Even the sceptical critic of *The Musical Times* felt qualified to report on 'a marvellously finished performance' thanks to the rehearsal conditions elicited by its composer-conductor. 'But then', acknowledged our anonymous correspondent, 'a Mahler premiere is as great an event in Germany or Austria as, say, the production of Sir Edward Elgar's hypothetical Symphony in E [recte E flat] will be in England'.

Based in Germany's industrial heartland, the orchestra is not an obvious destination for tonal opulence. Ragged edges to the string work wouldn't pass muster on the production line of one of the city's steel factories. A recording that favours low wind and strings paradoxically lacks weight where it really counts, such as the fiendish whirl of the *Rondo-Burleske*, and allows some crucial brass lines to go missing at the height of the first movement's fevered conflict between D minor and major.

In the context of a sensitively handled and unmannered account of the symphony as a whole, the passage from exposition to development in the *Andante comodo* nonetheless demands a more ineluctable momentum than it receives here. Netopil gives a stronger lead at points of dissolution such as the final pages of both first and last movements, and he nicely differentiates the Scherzo's urban waltz and rustic Ländler. However, I hope antiquated parochialism is not at play when I suggest that, distinguished by far more incisive playing and vivid engineering, the Hallé's recent recording (6/15) showed that Manchester could make a natural home for Mahler as it did for that much-anticipated symphony of Elgar's. **Peter Quantrill**

Mozart

Piano Concerto No 20, K466^a.

Piano Sonatas – No 3, K281; No 12, K332

Seong-Jin Cho pf^a Chamber Orchestra of Europe /

Yannick Nézet-Séguin

DG (F) 483 5522GH (64' • DDD)



Seong-Jin Cho talks in the booklet interview about how much Mozart means to him

and that conviction is apparent in these performances. He couldn't wish for a more empathetic conductor in the D minor Concerto than Yannick Nézet-Séguin, while the COE combine the warmth of a traditional orchestra with the characterful wind and brass of the period-aware. These qualities are in evidence from the very start, with a keenly dramatic orchestral *tutti*, while the bassoon-playing at 4'02" is irresistible. Cho, though relatively forwardly placed, feels absolutely part of the ensemble, and moments such as the dramatic outburst beginning at 6'44" have real power. Occasionally I was bothered by Cho's accentuation, which can rather stick out of the texture (from 8'19", for instance), compared to which Brendel and Mackerras sound powerful without edginess.

The Romanze is given with care but turn to Brendel, Andsnes or Pires (the last of these, with Abbado, exquisitely haloed) and you find a degree more naturalness. Perhaps that's vastly unfair; Cho is, after all, only 24, and these are some of the greatest Mozart interpreters on the planet. But therein lies the conundrum: when you win a major competition (the Chopin) and get an exclusive recording contract, inevitably you're out there in the full glare of the music world, ready or not.



Chopin Competition-winner Seong-Jin Cho couples Mozart's D minor Piano Concerto with two piano sonatas

The finale has a fizzing urgency to it and Cho's filigree playing is very impressive, but again there are moments that sound just a little forced. Pires and Abbado are in less of a hurry here and reveal more of the subtleties of Mozart's musical argument.

Of the two sonatas, K332 comes across more convincingly, with, in the opening movement, a nicely guileless approach to the major-key writing, which contrasts well with the driving minor-key passages. Cho is also alive to the shadows that lurk beneath the *Adagio*'s outwardly consoling demeanour. And the finale, which he takes at a fearless pace, is not only technically impressive but minutely reactive to Mozart's shifts of mood.

While there's some lovely quiet playing in K281, particularly in its bubbling finale, I find the tendency to overdo accentuation that was occasionally an issue in the concerto becomes more problematic here, particularly in the slow movement. William Youn is more natural-sounding, even though he chooses a slower pace, while Uchida's delicacy is unrivalled. Alongside them, Cho sounds a touch contrived. **Harriet Smith**

Piano Concerto No 20 – selected comparisons:
Brendel, SCO, Mackerras (1/00, 3/06)
(PHIL) 462 622-2PH or 475 7185PX2

Andsnes, Norwegian CO (4/08) (EMI/WARN) 500281-2
Pires, Orch Mozart, Abbado (1/13) (DG) 479 0075GH
Piano Sonatas – selected comparison:
Uchida (7/84^R, 9/84^R, 4/88^R) (PHIL) 468 356-2PB5
Piano Sonata No 3 – selected comparison:
Youn (1/17) (OEHM) OC1856

Mozart

Symphonies - No 39, K543;
No 40, K550; No 41, 'Jupiter', K551
Ensemble Appassionato / Mathieu Herzog
Naïve M ② V5457 (87' • DDD)



Ensemble Appassionato was convened by Mathieu Herzog, a founder member of the Ébène Quartet, and draws its members from a number of other French chamber ensembles. This is the group's first recording in its own right and the repertoire itself stands out as a statement of intent: Mozart's last three symphonies.

Herzog seeks to 'reconcile the different approaches that have marked their performing history' – bridging the gap, so he says, between Bruno Walter's approach and Nikolaus Harnoncourt's. He also sees these works of 1788 through a Beethovenian lens, performing them

'with a certain form of strength, with, for example, powerful and massive orchestral *tutti*s'. So, at root, these are modern-instrument performances that digest the historical discoveries of our time and offer a full-bodied chamber presentation.

That's not too different from the tacks taken by a number of other groups in this and later music. Nevertheless, these three performances are, in their own ways, individual, minutely considered and thus, perhaps inevitably, not to every taste.

Primarily there are the speeds – and not only in the minuets, which here are all faster than one could feasibly minuet. That's the fashion these days, and those of us who wish for a little moderation are cast as modern Cassandras. But try the outer movements of the *Jupiter*, which sprint away from the starting line. Can the musicians keep up? They assuredly can; and the finale is as exciting as any you're likely to hear on record. Odd, though, that the first movement opens like the crack of a whip before settling into a general tempo a few notches less manic.

On the other hand, No 40 opens with something a touch more suave than its nervy *Sturm und Drang* might suggest, closer to debonair Abbado with his Orchestra Mozart (DG, 1/12) than to Mackerras and his go-ahead Scots (Linn, 4/08). The slow movement, too, hangs

philharmonia orchestra

Sunday 3 February, 7.30pm

Radu Lupu plays Beethoven's
Piano Concerto No. 4

Thursday 7 February, 7.30pm

Peter Eötvös conducts the UK
premiere of his spectacular
Multiversum, plus Schoenberg,
Stravinsky and Bartòk

Sunday 17 February, 7.30pm

Philippe Herreweghe conducts
Bach and Mozart

Sunday 24 February, 7.30pm

Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts
his Cello Concerto with soloist
Truls Mørk, and Bartòk's
Concerto for Orchestra

Thursday 28 February, 7.30pm

Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts
Berio's *Folk Songs* with Marianne
Crebassa, his tutor Donatoni's
ESA, and Respighi's *Pines
of Rome*

Tickets £12 - £58

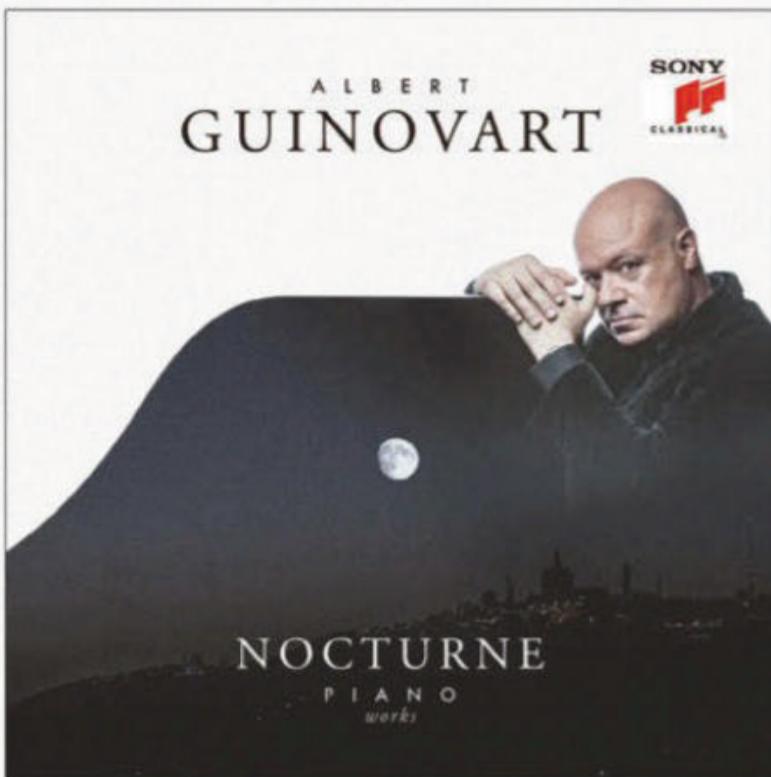
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back more than many recent recordings, going more by the quaver than the dotted crotchet.

The ensemble sound, however, is one of the glories of this set. As chamber players and therefore soloists in their own rights, the contribution of each player is palpable. The strings display corporate agility without sinking into routine and the woodwind are as perky as can be, especially the clarinets in Nos 39 and 40 (the revised version). The bass lines are kept elastic and full of personality, providing fertile soil in which to cultivate the performances.

Black marks? We are notably short on second-half repeats, which is especially damaging in the finales of Nos 39 and 41. On my iPod, the three symphonies clock in at 85'29" – and there are single discs that run that long – so it is miserly to deprive us of those telling returns. There are also one or two moments where ensemble comes apart: the bassoon commentary as No 40's opening movement recapitulates (from around 5'18") rather drags its heels.

All the same, this set arrived rather as an eccentric new flatmate, whose quirks initially irritate but whom one soon comes to love for all their oddities. From the description above, you will know whether this is your sort of thing. Even though I wish Mackerras hadn't moved out, I ended up very much enjoying cohabiting with Herzog's Mozart. **David Threasher**

Rimsky-Korsakov • Stravinsky

Rimsky-Korsakov The Golden Cockerel – Suite
Stravinsky The Firebird (1910 version)
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko
Onyx Ⓜ ONYX4175 (75' • DDD)



I'm surprised this isn't a regular pairing on disc: two heavily lacquered Russian tales by teacher and pupil, both featuring magical birds, composed just a few years apart. Vasily Petrenko continues his Stravinsky ballet series with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra for Onyx by offering the complete score to *The Firebird* preceded by the orchestral suite that Glazunov and Steinberg drew from Rimsky-Korsakov's satirical opera *Le coq d'or* ('The Golden Cockerel') after his death.

The Firebird is the score where Stravinsky pays his debt to Rimsky most heavily, particularly in its exotic colouring. Here, the xylophone rattles menacingly ahead of

a weighty Infernal Dance and the finale bursts with rejoicing, but the best moments in this *Firebird* aren't the raucous ones. Petrenko homes in on the fine details, like a craftsman working with gold leaf and the finest of brushes. Creeping basses and glassy *sul ponticello* violins evoke the most sinister of nocturnal atmospheres. The firebird herself flutters from branch to branch via splendidly articulated flute-playing, while the Khorovod and Berceuse are incredibly beautiful, handled like porcelain, the conductor happy to linger over tender moments.

From its opening pinpoint trumpet cock-crow, Petrenko's Rimsky is just as exquisite. He encourages his clarinettist to tease out the sleepy opening solo, as the lazy Tsar Dodon rules from his bed. Woodwinds coil as the seductive Queen of Shemakha coaxes him into a bumbling dance and there is military bluster in the pompous wedding procession before the golden cockerel pecks the tsar to death.

The sound in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall is warm but clear. With good booklet notes and a pleasing cover taken from Léon Bakst's drawing of Tsarevich Ivan capturing the Firebird, this is a most attractive release. **Mark Pullinger**

Saint-Saëns

Symphony No 3, 'Organ', Op 78^a. Samson et Dalila – Bacchanale. Trois Tableaux symphoniques d'après La foi, Op 130

^aPaul Jacobs org

Utah Symphony Orchestra / Thierry Fischer

Hyperion Ⓜ CDA68201 (75' • DDD)

Recorded live at Abravanel Hall, Salt Lake City, December 1 & 2, 2017



Thierry Fischer leads a superb, thoroughly enjoyable reading of Saint-Saëns's *Organ* Symphony. While he doesn't generate quite as much heat as Charles Munch's classic account with the Boston Symphony (RCA, 4/93), his sense of pacing and architecture is masterly. Transitions are deftly manoeuvred, for example, as in the join between exposition and development in the opening *Allegro moderato* (start around 4'50"), and the naturalness with which that part eventually dissolves into the radiant *Poco adagio*. I was impressed, too, by the way Fischer shapes the *Allegro* so it seems to surge ever so gradually to its *fortississimo* climax at 7'44".

Fischer's tempo for the *Adagio* is several notches below the composer's metronome mark yet flows easily. I believe Abravanel

Hall in Salt Lake City is fitted with an electric organ (not the optimal choice), but the instrument is sonically well integrated with the orchestra, aided by engineering that provides a natural, concert-hall perspective. There are surprisingly few blemishes given this is a live recording, and these are more than made up for by a palpable frisson, particularly in the symphony's second half. There's tremendous rhythmic vitality and verve in what serves as the scherzo, while the finale has muscle and bite – listen, say, to the blustery violins at 6'03" – as well as glory and grandeur.

I do wish Fischer luxuriated more in the sinuous exoticism of the Bacchanale from *Samson et Dalila* but he pulls out the stops in the coda, at least. And although the three tableaux drawn from incidental music to Eugène Brieux's play *La foi* (1909) are a roughly sewn stylistic hotchpotch full of dull as well as striking passages, Fischer seems to believe in every note, and – as in the *Organ* Symphony – inspires fiercely committed playing from the orchestra throughout. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Sawyers

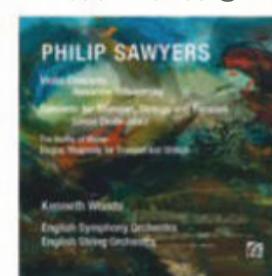
Violin Concerto^a. Trumpet Concerto^b.

The Valley of Vision^c. Elegiac Rhapsody^b

^bSimon Desbruslais tpt^a Alexander Sitkovetsky vn

^bEnglish String Orchestra; ^{ac}English Symphony Orchestra / Kenneth Woods

Nimbus Alliance Ⓜ NI6374 (80' • DDD)



Nimbus's coverage of Philip Sawyers continues with a release of orchestral pieces written during 2015–17. Rawsthorne has been cited in connection with his music, and if the Violin Concerto only tacitly resembles that composer's second such work, it does exude a distinct mid-20th-century quality in its formal and expressive objectivity. Both the outer movements keep their lyricism firmly in check through a tensile rhythmic sense, with even the *Andante* having a restiveness and tension to offset any hint of indulgence: no nostalgic lingering here.

Alexander Sitkovetsky renders this piece with appropriate verve, as does Simon Desbruslais the Concerto for trumpet, strings and timpani that arguably leaves the stronger impression. Here the combative outer *Allegros* make incisive play with this three-way combination, and the central slow movement explores emotional depths which seem the greater for not being dwelt upon. Such probing intensity is no less

tangible in *The Valley of Vision*, a symphonic poem inspired by Samuel Palmer – notably his visionary early landscapes – whose control of momentum, through to the climactic faster section before returning to its initial pensiveness, is never in doubt. *Elegiac Rhapsody*, Sawyers's 'song without words' written in response to the death of John McCabe, concludes this disc in understated yet affecting manner.

The English SO are unfailingly committed in the perceptive hands of Kenneth Woods, who joins the composer in contributing perceptive booklet notes. Head first to Sawyers's Second (10/14) or Third (10/17) Symphonies, to either of which this disc is an admirable follow-up.

Richard Whitehouse

Schreker

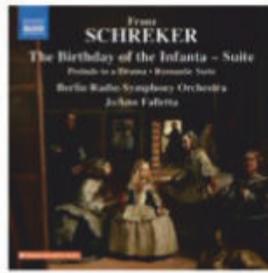
Der Geburtstag der Infantin - Suite.

Romantische Suite, Op 14.

Vorspiel zu einem Drama

Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra / JoAnn Falletta

Naxos (M) 8 573821 (64' • DDD)



This selection of orchestral music from Schreker's early to middle period nicely complements the recording of middle to late works by Lawrence Renes that I welcomed in January 2017. There's no direct duplication of repertoire across the two recordings, although there is some overlap of music in that the *Vorspiel zu einem Drama* ('Prelude to a Drama') featured here is a much-extended version of the Overture to *Die Gezeichneten* ('The Stigmatised') included on the Renes recording. Premiered by the Vienna Philharmonic under Weingartner in 1914, the Prelude represents Schreker's music at its most opulently scored and romantically charged, a style that for a time brought the composer success comparable to that enjoyed by Richard Strauss.

By contrast, Schreker's music from the pantomime *Der Geburtstag der Infantin* ('The Birthday of the Infanta'), based on the novella by Oscar Wilde, is a much lighter affair. The original 1908 score was written for chamber orchestra, and although Schreker rescored the 1923 Suite for a full-size orchestra, the result still sounds fresh and engaging. A highlight is the music for the third number, 'Die Marionetten', featuring a sentimental but ravishing melody for solo oboe that instals itself indelibly in the mind.

The earliest work on the disc is the four-movement *Romantic Suite*, completed in

1903 when Schreker was 25. The composer's expressive style is already distinctive, although there are also passages which sound indebted to Brahms and Dvořák. Both here and in the other works, JoAnn Falletta conducts performances that are assured, spontaneous and superbly played, although perhaps not quite as sumptuously recorded as this music deserves. Nevertheless, this is a highly recommendable release for anyone interested in Schreker's music.

Christian Hoskins

Shostakovich

Symphony No 8, Op 65

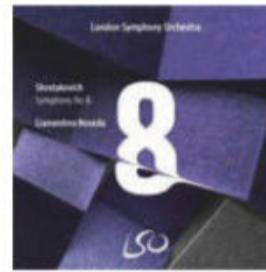
London Symphony Orchestra /

Gianandrea Noseda

LSO Live (F) LSO0822 (65' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

April 8, 2018



I always think that the opening bars of this war-torn essay suggest the flipside, the oppressively dark side, of the Fifth Symphony. No more 'A Soviet artist's reply to just criticism', simply a Soviet artist's outrage. The restless, halting opening paragraph is shot through with a yearning lyricism – out of reach but not out of bounds. It's like the piece simply doesn't know which way to turn to escape the darkness. Gianandrea Noseda (one-time principal guest conductor of the Mariinsky Theatre) has a firm handle on the depth and breadth of the symphony, chronicling his way through its empty wastes and bone-crushing upheavals of rolling percussion. The first movement's long oration for solo cor anglais – Shostakovich's instrument of choice for the desolate – is typical of the London Symphony Orchestra's intense and deeply felt playing throughout.

Perhaps I miss that last degree of trenchancy and abandon in the inner movements – the strident second movement with its shouty woodwinds and spooky Trio and the scarifying *moto perpetuo* of the third where the LSO's first trumpet duly finds the sour tang of the militaristic Trio (if not quite the coarse edge of the old traditional Russian trumpet sound). It all feels just a little too 'controlled', urbane even. But then the numbing effect of the eternal passacaglia takes hold (the apogee, I always think, of the kinship between Shostakovich and Britten – think *Grimes*), its slow processional disturbed only by mournful overlaid woodwind arias, and Noseda certainly has the measure of its concentration.

I think the single most extraordinary moment in the entire symphony is that most enlightening of modulations (just a glimmer of hope after all the carnage) into the final *Allegretto*. The trick (and Noseda pulls this off) is to make it sound at once unexpected and inevitable. Notwithstanding being crushed by yet one more seismic upheaval, the sweet, if cautious, consolation of the final pages is beautifully achieved here. There is one final question mark at the end. Of course there is. But its composer lives to fight another day. **Edward Seckerson**

R Strauss

Violin Concerto, Op 8. Arabella - Aber der Richtige Cäcilie, Op 27 No 2. Little Scherzino, Op 3 No 4. Romanze. Traum durch die Dämmerung, Op 29 No 1. Wiegenlied, Op 41 No 1. Zueignung, Op 10 No 1

Arabella Steinbacher vn

WDR Symphony Orchestra / Lawrence Foster

Pentatone (F) PTC5186 653 (61' • DDD/DSD)



What do you do if you're a violinist wanting to pay homage to Richard Strauss? The composer wrote some fabulous music for the instrument but most of it, from his maturity at least, is woven into the fabric of his tone poems and operas. But Arabella Steinbacher has more reason to honour the composer than many: as the booklet to this release reveals, she grew up the daughter of a vocal coach at the Bavarian State Opera, surrounded by his music; she was named, indeed, after the heroine of his final opera to a libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

There's no arguing with her Straussian heritage, then. And there's little to quibble with either when it comes to Steinbacher's playing in the early Violin Concerto that takes up the bulk of the disc: warm, eloquent and sprightly, and robustly accompanied by Lawrence Foster and the WDR Orchestra. The problem lies in the concerto itself, an early work of remarkable fluency but little individuality – the young composer offers something like Mendelssohn on steroids, with none of the melodic originality that would soon become a hallmark.

There's no shortage of Strauss the tunesmith later in the programme, though. After a tender account of the *Romanze*, pilfered from the cello repertoire, and an enjoyable arrangement of the early piano *Scherzino*, we get on to meatier fare with a handful of songs. Here Steinbacher is



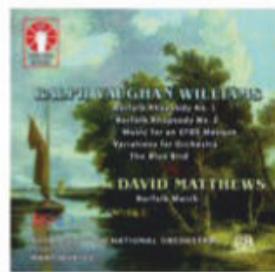
Exquisite: Vassily Petrenko guides the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in an attractive coupling of Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky - see review on page 45

predictably eloquent, the playing classy. But the violin itself struggles to project in what are already string-heavy orchestrations, at a tessitura that sounds exciting when sung but sits far too comfortably in the instrument's middle range. Similarly, though she double-stops her way through the *Arabella* extract pleasingly, it just made me long to hear the music in the original line-up of two silver-voiced sopranos. **Hugo Shirley**

Vaughan Williams · D Matthews

D Matthews Norfolk March **Vaughan Williams**
The Blue Bird. Christmas Overture. Music for an
EFDS Masque. Norfolk Rhapsodies - No 1; No 2.
Variations for Orchestra

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Martin Yates
Dutton Epoch F CDLX7351 (77' • DDD/DSD)



During January 1905 Vaughan Williams paid a visit to King's Lynn and the surrounding area in order to collect folk songs, and the following year he wrote no fewer than three *Norfolk Rhapsodies*. The First (revised in 1914) justly remains a favourite, but its successor was withdrawn

by the composer and not heard again until early this century, when Richard Hickox recorded it with the LSO (Chandos, 1/03) in a wonderfully sensitive completion by Stephen Hogger. Martin Yates and the RSNO are admirably chipper exponents, though it's Hickox who makes more of that magical modulation towards the close of No 2 (track 11, 9'13") that always puts me in mind of George Butterworth's orchestral rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad*. The manuscript and parts of No 3 disappeared without trace during the First World War – but what does survive is a detailed description by the critic WA Morgan (who attended the September 1907 Cardiff Festival premiere), from which David Matthews has been able to reimagine the score from a contemporary perspective. Completed in 2016 (the centenary year of the Somme Offensive), the resulting *Norfolk March* emerges as an altogether more troubled statement than the other two rhapsodies, the trumpet-writing in its bleak coda consciously recalling RVW's own 'war requiem', *A Pastoral Symphony*.

Proceedings are launched with a charming 15-minute sequence of incidental music that RVW penned in 1913 for Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*. We do not know for whom it was written or, indeed, whether it was ever performed. What's not

in doubt, however, is that Martin Yates's idiomatic orchestration of the composer's handwritten piano score falls most agreeably on the ear. Yates has also devised an exuberant diptych comprising a Folk Dance Medley and Little March Suite that RVW fashioned in 1934 at the behest of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Rounding off a generous programme is Gordon Jacob's deft 1959 orchestration of the invigorating Variations originally conceived as a test-piece for the 1957 National Brass Band Championships, and Yates's sympathetic completion of a miniature *Christmas Overture* (in all likelihood another offering for the EFDSS, again dating from 1934).

In summary, a most rewarding compendium, finely played and expertly engineered. Lewis Foreman provides an absorbing booklet essay. **Andrew Achenbach**

À Portuguesa'

Aison Concerto grosso No 5 **Boccherini** String Quintet, 'Musica notturna delle strade di Madrid', Op 30 No 6 **Corbett** Concerto 'alla Portuguesa', Op 8 No 7 **D Scarlatti** Keyboard Sonatas - Kk8; Kk13; Kk173 **Seixas** Two Concertos a 4 **Casa da Música Baroque Orchestra / Andreas Staier** hpd Harmonia Mundi F HMM90 2337 (65' • DDD)

GRAMOPHONE Focus

MUNICH TO THE EARS

Peter Quantrill works his way through an anniversary overview of the Munich Philharmonic's recording history



Sergiu Celibidache moulded the sound of the Munich Philharmonic to perfection

Münchner Philharmoniker

Beethoven Symphony No 3, 'Eroica', Op 55^a
Berlioz La damnation de Faust, Op 24^b **Brahms**
 Alto Rhapsody, Op 53^c. Symphony No 2, Op 73^a
Mozart Ave verum corpus, K618^d. Requiem, K626 (fragment)^d. Serenade No 10, 'Gran Partita', K361^e. Symphony No 40, K550^f. Die Zauberflöte^g **Pfitzner** Von deutscher Seele, Op 28^h **Prokofiev** Scythian Suite, Op 20ⁱ. Romeo and Juliet, Op 64 - excs^j **Reger** An die Hoffnung, Op 124^j. Variations and Fugue on a Theme by JA Hiller, Op 100^k **Rimsky-Korsakov** Sheherazade, Op 35^l **Schubert** Symphonies - No 5, D485^f; No 9, 'Great', D944^m **Shostakovich** Symphony No 4, Op 43^l **Stravinsky** Symphonies of Wind Instruments^l **Verdi** Messa da Requiemⁿ
 Soloists include ^c**Christa Ludwig** contr
^g**Bavarian State Opera Chorus; Munich**
Philharmonic ^{bcdh}**Choir and Orchestra /** ⁱ**Sergiu Celibidache, l Valery Gergiev, cjk Eugen Jochum, a Hans Knappertsbusch, b James Levine, n Lorin Maazel, de Zubin Mehta, g Fritz Rieger, h Horst Stein, m Christian Thielemann, f Günter Wand**
 Münchner Philharmoniker © ⑯ MPHIL0011
 (17h 12' • ADD/DDD)
 Recorded 1953-2018

This anniversary set gets off to a solid start with a weighty, plain-spoken 1953 *Eroica* and a pastorally accented 1956 Brahms Second from Hans Knappertsbusch at his most forthright. But, you may ask, what about the first half of the orchestra's history? What of

its pre-war music directors Siegmund von Hausegger and Oswald Kabasta? What indeed, for a policy move of 'Don't mention the war' prevails; unusual in modern Germany, and unfortunate for an institution once proud to declare itself 'National Orchestra of the Fascist Movement', whose scores were emblazoned with swastikas that were finally effaced half a century later.

There is no place here for the card-carrying Kabasta beyond a couple of passing references in the booklet. A 'documentary history in facts and figures' outlines the origins of the orchestra under the sponsorship of a wealthy local businessman before pirouetting elliptically into its



considerable Bruckner and rather less fabled Mahler traditions which, within the attractively designed box itself, remain undocumented. So does the rehabilitating work of the orchestra's first post-war music director, Hans Rosbaud.

The Knappertsbusch performances have been previously issued by Golden Melodram, whereas a 1964 *Magic Flute* from the National Theatre is new to the catalogue – save for the arias and duets sung by Fritz Wunderlich's Tamino, which were cherry-picked by DG for a 'Live on Stage' compilation in 2010. He leads a cast stronger on youth (including Hermann Prey's Papageno and a peach of a Pamina from Anneliese Rothenberger) than experience (Karl Christian Kohn, unsteady as Sarastro, and a pinched, rhythmically insecure Queen of the Night from Erica Koth). There's spirited leadership from Fritz Rieger in the pit, offering partial compensation for yards of dialogue and boxy mono sound.

Skipping unaccountably past the decade-long tenure of Rudolf Kempe (1967-76), the compilers next alight on a pair of guest appearances by Christa Ludwig and Eugen Jochum in 1979 and 1981, getting to the heart of Brahms's *Alto Rhapsody* and Reger's complementary Hölderlin-setting *An die Hoffnung*. With one of very few orchestras who could claim to have Reger under their fingertips, Jochum gives an incandescent performance of the *Hiller Variations*.

It's a highlight of the box. So is *Von deutscher Seele*, the evening-long love song to the poetry of Eichendorff by another ill-travelling German reactionary of the early 20th century, Hans Pfitzner. More expansive yet more urgent than any rival on disc (mostly conducting the rival band of Bavarian Radio), Horst Stein directs a superbly matched cast of soloists: Luana DeVol, Doris Soffel, Thomas Moser and Alfred Muff. In his invaluable Pfitzner monograph, John Williamson makes a claim for the piece as 'the finest choral work by a German-speaking composer between *Gurrelieder* and *Carmina Burana*': not so far-fetched now, even the climactic, organ-capped paean to 'Das Land'.

Pfitzner confessed to Thomas Mann that in his opera *Palestrina* 'everything leans to the past; there is a prevailing sympathy with death'. It's a Bavarian thing; modern-era performances of Requiems and 'late works' take themselves very seriously indeed. Even the notably consistent aesthetic of Günter Wand bends to the Munich way in Mozart's 40th Symphony, with smoother legato and broader tempos. As successor to Kempe,

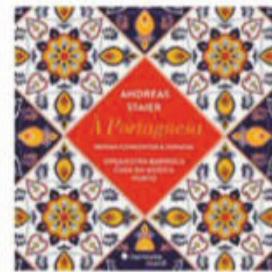
Sergiu Celibidache moulded the orchestra's sound in his image of perfection; his legacy is suitably represented with Prokofiev, a mink-lined *Scythian Suite* and *Romeo and Juliet* extracts of alternately beguiling and bewildering perversity.

Dying suddenly in 1996, Celibidache cast a baleful shadow; none of his successors has lasted long in post. Taking over in 1999, James Levine notably broadened the orchestra's repertoire, and he coaches a lighter French accent in a *Damnation of Faust* from the same year, rather successfully issuing a challenge to Mann's exclusive claim for Goethe's anti-hero as 'the representative of the German soul' with the aid of excellent (local) choral work and an international cast led by José van Dam hamming up Méphistophélès.

Even if the past isn't another country in Munich, the Philharmonic has adapted to the streaming age with a digital-only label, issuing performances that stand comparison with the representations of their conductors' work in the box. A 2016 Mozart-anniversary concert led by Zubin Mehta features a Room 101 Requiem fragment (up to the first 10 bars of the Lacrymosa) with an ill-assorted team of soloists and a glutinous *Ave verum corpus* to close; it's no match for the digital-only *Das Lied von der Erde* (celebrating the centenary of the premiere given by this orchestra) with Peter Seiffert and Thomas Hampson rekindling their partnership on Rattle's studio recording.

Another tenor-baritone partnership, of Toby Spence and Hanno Müller-Brachmann, lends moving detail to Lorin Maazel's late account of Britten's *War Requiem* (digital only); measured but never static, unlike the Verdi Requiem in the box (and previously issued by Sony, 7/15). At his most individualistic, Christian Thielemann leads a 'Great' C major Symphony of sporadically mesmerising breadth and power, drawn as if from an invented tradition, whereas a digital-only Mendelssohn *Italian* is a model of comparatively feline grace.

The box comes up to date with Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony and Rimsky's *Sheherazade* with the orchestra's current chief, Valery Gergiev: very similar to his previous accounts of both works on record, albeit opulent and (again) more expansive, still recognisably played by 'Celi's band'. To sum up? It's essential listening for followers of Reger and Pfitzner. Streaming-friendly listeners will want to investigate the treasure buried online. 



In the wake of the wars of the Portuguese Restoration and the Spanish Succession, the courts of Lisbon and Madrid sought to move away from their traditional austerity. Though Farinelli and Scarlatti were the most renowned Italian musicians recruited to further this project, they were joined by a steady stream of their compatriots, including architects, painters, sculptors and other musicians. This interesting programme provides a window on 18th-century Iberia, when Bourbons sat on the throne of Spain and the Braganzas ruled Portugal.

Britain's special relationship with Lisbon is given its full due in William Corbett's *Concerto 'alla Portuguesa'*, inspired by the music written by Italians in Portugal, from his collection of concertos called *Le bizzarie universali*, published in 1728 and 1742. One manifestation of the esteem in which Scarlatti was held in contemporary England is Charles Avison's 1744 Concerto grosso No 5, in which each individual movement is an orchestral transcription of one of Scarlatti's sonatas. Staier plays three Scarlatti sonatas, flanked by two harpsichord concertos by his gifted pupil in Lisbon, Carlos de Seixas. The latest work on the programme by at least a generation is Staier's arrangement for string orchestra and harpsichords of Boccherini's famous D minor Quintet, Op 30 No 6, depicting music in the streets of Madrid at night. It is unclear what this charming piece may have gained in sonority to counterbalance a certain reduction in textural flexibility.

The Orquestra Barroca Casa da Música, founded in 2006, uses four firsts and seconds, two violas, two cellos, bass and continuo harpsichord for this recording, offering up efficient performances. They will be touring various venues in Europe with Staier in this programme during the coming season. **Patrick Rucker**

'The Mumbai Concerts'

Beethoven Violin Concerto, Op 61^a Brahms Double Concerto, Op 102^b Dvořák Carnival, Op 92 B169 Ravel Daphnis et Chloé - Suite No 2. La valse J Strauss II Die Fledermaus - Overture Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23^c ab Pinchas Zukerman vn^b Amanda Forsyth vc Denis Matsuev pf Israel Philharmonic Orchestra / Zubin Mehta
Accentus ② DVD ACC20383; ② BD ACC10383 (3h 10' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0)
Recorded live at the National Center for the Performing Arts, Mumbai, April 2016



'Bombay was an English city during my youth', Zubin Mehta has noted. His father founded the

Bombay Symphony so it's no surprise that he grew up assimilated in Western culture. Mehta was born in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1936, the same year that the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra was founded (as the Palestine Orchestra, by Bronisław Huberman), and has had a long, fruitful relationship with the orchestra, which he first conducted in 1961. Mehta was appointed its Music Director for Life in 1981 – a post he plans to relinquish next December – and in April 2016 he celebrated his 80th birthday by taking the IPO to Mumbai for this pair of homecoming concerts at the National Center for the Performing Arts.

There's a palpable sense of occasion. Mehta is adored in Mumbai and the city turned out in its colourful finery for both concerts. Conductor, soloists and the entire orchestra are bedecked with garlands, fitting for such a celebration. Both programmes are a little odd: Beethoven's Violin Concerto followed by a couple of Ravel warhorses; then Brahms's Double paired with Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, which is possibly one concerto too many.

Mehta is an old-school conductor and the playing here has plenty of the grand manner about it – a plush string sound and unhurried tempos, the equivalent of snuggling down into a leather armchair. The problem is that the performances sound too comfortable, too safe. Dvořák's *Carnival* overture has never sounded less festive, the overture to Strauss's *Fledermaus* more stolid. In two of the concertos, Mehta is joined by longstanding friend and collaborator Pinchas Zukerman. His Beethoven is rich and muscular, technically superb, but there's little revolutionary fire here. The Brahms Double, with the American cellist Amanda Forsyth, suits this approach a little better; the central *Andante* contains some lovely playing, glowing with warmth. Denis Matsuev thumps his way through Tchaikovsky – an impressive enough feat but I've heard him play it with much more personality.

The two Ravel items come off best: *La valse* has a certain *fin de siècle* grandeur and the Second Suite from *Daphnis et Chloé* features a gorgeous sunrise and a pulpy flute solo in the Pantomime.

Mark Pullinger

Bach-Busoni Chaconne

Federico Colli talks to Tim Parry about one of the great piano transcriptions

It's well known that Busoni envisaged Bach's Chaconne first as an organ work, and then transcribed this imaginary version for the piano using the techniques also found in his arrangements of, among other works, the D minor Toccata and Fugue, the C major Toccata, Adagio and Fugue, and the *St Anne* Prelude and Fugue. For some, this approach results in the loss of part of the Chaconne's essence, namely the friction between the epic grandeur of the conception and the more intimate scope of its realisation – a friction we also find in, say, Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* and *Hammerklavier* Sonata. By imagining the work first as an organ piece, Busoni's arrangement is effectively a double transcription. The music's majestic opulence and nobility are amplified, thrillingly so, at the expense of the battle between concept and medium.

I start by asking Federico Colli where he stands on this, and for him there is clearly a bigger issue at stake. 'I think the point is a theological one. Why did Bach compose this piece, full of symbols, full of signs, full of evocations, full of transcendence, for an instrument – a marvellous instrument – that is limited in terms of its sound? We have form, and we have content. In the original solo violin version of the Chaconne, the content is incredibly deep, and the form, a set of variations on a repeating four-bar scheme, is very easy. Busoni recognised the deep nature of the content and created the best medium, for him, in order to show this content.'

This is already somewhat provocative. But Colli continues: 'I ask myself why Ravel – one of the greatest orchestrators in history – didn't make an orchestral transcription of the Chaconne, and I think the answer is that only someone who was able to understand the connection between the human soul and transcendence is able to imagine this transcription. Busoni once said that "Only the transcendent (the divine) deserves adoration", and he chose this music for that reason. Busoni was not a great orchestrator, but he was a great pianist, and he turned to this material to create one of the greatest transcriptions of all time.'

I know the subject of transcendence is one we'll return to, but first I ask whether Colli has looked at Brahms's transcription, for left hand alone, which is more concerned with recreating the struggle between the content and its representation. 'Yes, I love the Brahms arrangement, but for me nothing really compares with the Busoni. When I first heard the recording by Michelangeli [a famous account, recorded by the young Michelangeli in 1948, highlighted by Jed Distler in his recent Collection survey on this work (A/18)], it felt just like when you put in your contact lenses in the morning, and suddenly you can see everything clearly. I thought, this is it, this is the transcription that makes sense.'

The mention of Michelangeli makes me wonder whether Colli is a pianist who listens to other recordings. 'I grew up with the Michelangeli recording, and the other one I love is Pletnev's from Carnegie Hall, which is fantastic for its sound.' Here, Colli picks up on precisely the quality of Pletnev's live account that caught Jed Distler's attention. Sonority is clearly



Federico Colli is dazzled by Bach's spirituality and Busoni's pianism

important to Colli, as indeed it was to Busoni, which has to be a good thing when playing this transcription.

After an engaging conversation about further pianists, Colli pursues his theological line. There is a whole area of Bach research that deals with the religious character of Bach's secular music, particularly the instrumental works, including identifying correlations between extracts of the music and specific parts of the Bible. With this in mind, Colli points to the very opening of the Chaconne. 'Note that the music starts on the second beat, not the first, and the accent comes on this second beat. The effect is like someone walking with a limp. What is the reason for this? The character in the Bible who walks with a limp is Jacob, one of the most important characters in the Old Testament. Here, in this music, we are in the presence of Jacob.' He elaborates further, and is both passionate and compelling. I suggest that it is part of Bach's greatness that his music sustains many different ways of hearing and appreciating it. Colli agrees up to a point, but insists that since Bach saw God in everything he wrote, it is essential that we approach his music in this way. The narrative that he has constructed – outlined in his very personal booklet note for this recording – is highly detailed, and he concedes that other narratives may make sense for other people. But when I ask whether the idea of transcendence, of experiencing beauty through the search for truth, is something we can strive for even if we don't view this music in such religious terms, Colli is adamant: 'No. Not with Bach. If you are playing Bach and you want to understand his soul, you must understand his relationship with Christianity and the divine.' I'm reminded that Steven Isserlis wrote a similarly personal note for his recording of the Cello Suites, where he also relates the music to a biblical narrative, and this pleases Colli.

As we look through the score, the focus shifts to Busoni's wonderfully imaginative adaptation. I was struck listening to Colli's recording how willing he is to stretch the pulse when he feels the music needs more time, and how extraordinary his dynamic range is, especially his withdrawal to the most ethereal of *pianissimos*. One such passage is following the first big climax, where Busoni adds an extra bar to extend Bach's passagework. Naturally, Colli plays this extra bar. 'Of course,' he confirms. 'This part needs so much sound, and sound needs time.' In the following bar (bar 78, 4'35" on Colli's recording), where the music recedes, *dolce espressivo*, Colli allows himself a generous amount of time for his retreat to such a soft dynamic. He points out that on the bottom octave D Busoni marks, very unusually, a *sforzando* with an immediate diminuendo to *piano*, suggesting a natural pianistic decay. 'We need time,' insists Colli, with a phrase that becomes something of a mantra. 'In one note we need to go from *fortissimo*, indeed from *sforzandissimo*, to *piano*. Imagine how much time we need to create this change. This is how Busoni tells us that something important is happening. It's a very deliberate marking.'

If you are playing Bach and you want to understand his soul, you must understand his relationship with Christianity'

The importance of Busoni's markings – their detail and precision – is a recurrent theme in our conversation. The 'sighing' gestures four bars later, marked *dolente*; the frequent reminders not to rush in instructions like *deciso*, *misurato*, *non affrettare*, and the non-legato directions that suggest every note in a passage has importance; the many *tenuto* markings that Colli says are a sign to give the music time and space; and descriptions like *tranquillo*, *languido* and *dolcissimo* – for Colli these are all direct and specific indications of character. Ultimately, I'm left in no doubt that his interpretation, as personal as it is, stems from a close scrutiny not only of Bach's music but of the details Busoni took the trouble to write down. I recall a celebrated pianist telling me years ago that if you want to get closer to understanding a piece of music, you need to look more closely at the score. 'Absolutely,' enthuses Colli. 'Go back to the score. That's really important. On the score you can see the symbols of the composer's soul.'

We finish at the very end: after the magisterial return of the opening theme – which Busoni delivers with huge, bass-reinforced chords and an exhilarating sense of arrival – Busoni ends with a full chord, in D minor but with a bracketed option of ending in the major. Bach, of course, ends with a unison D. Like many pianists, Colli opts for the life-affirming D major ending. 'We have three options,' he says. 'We can end on an octave D. We can end in the major. Or we can end in the minor. We need to make a decision here. Bach writes a unison D for the violin, but Busoni wants a full chord, and he gives us a choice. If we end in the minor, it feels like an acceptance that our world is the only world; this is the reality, no more. If we end in the major, we are embracing the possibility of another world beyond ours. For me, Bach's unison D implies the major; that's what was expected in the Baroque. Busoni gives us the freedom to choose, and I choose the major key. Maybe that's because I'm young and I see the future as bright. Perhaps in 20 years I'll feel differently.'

▶ See the review of Federico Colli's Bach-Busoni on page 60

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David Threasher on two versions of Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata: 'This is nowadays only ever played in transcription, so further adaptation cannot be considered beyond the pale' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



Richard Bratby enjoys an Italian-themed disc from Italy: 'Francesca Dego dashes and darts, and dispatches her fireworks with aristocratic hauteur' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 57**

JS Bach · Pierini

JS Bach Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080

Pierini Cantai un tempo ... (dopo una lettura di Monteverdi)^a

Claudia Barainsky sop **Delian Quartet**

Oehms Ⓜ ② OC468 (112' • DDD)



Previous Oehms albums from this German quartet have occasioned critical

reservations in these pages over their apparently ill-prepared or uncommitted playing of Schumann and Beethoven (1/09, 6/13). No complaints on that score: this is a confident and shapely traversal of *The Art of Fugue* in an intelligent ordering of the material that interposes the canons at strategic points between the contrapuncti, sensitively rounds off the uncompleted three-voice fugue with the 'deathbed chorale' and even sets aside the pair of mirror fugues for their prescribed instruments ('a 2 claviere' as indicated on the manuscript) as an encore to an adventurous companion piece by the Italian composer Stefano Pierini (b1971).

So what's my beef? That new piece, for starters. *Cantai un tempo...* takes its name from the first of three mock-Renaissance madrigals on period texts which Pierini prefaces with instrumental intermezzos. Claudia Barainsky's sensual delivery of the vocal lines sits at odds with the dissonant, splintered accompaniment: artful hall-of-mirrors stuff, and an ancient-modern conceit fulfilled rather more affectingly in the quartet arena by Adès's *Arcadiana*, now a quarter of a century old.

Back to Bach, then. With their pretty but astringent tone and clipped phrasing the Delians style themselves as a viol consort manqué, but turn to Fretwork or especially Phantasm (my top choice 10 years ago for BBC Radio 3's *Building a Library*) and you'll encounter playing on another level of commitment and sympathy – and gravity. Yes, fugues such as the Vivaldian No 9 can dance if you

want them to. But if the elderly Bach had wished to sum up his life's work with another dance suite, that's what he would have done. He didn't. Forensically close recorded sound, a brisk and businesslike attitude to the great statements of the work (not least Nos 4, 8 and 11) and most of all the Delians' bleached, pine-scented tone all conspire to rob Bach's musical will and testament of the seriousness of purpose which is its due however and wherever it's performed. **Peter Quantrill**

Bach – selected comparison:

Phantasm (3/99) (SIMA) PSC1135

Beethoven

'Piano Trios, Vol 2'

Piano Trios - No 2, Op 1 No 2; No 6, Op 70 No 2

Trio Con Brio Copenhagen

Orchid Ⓜ ORC100091 (64' • DDD)



Trio Con Brio launched their Beethoven piano trio cycle earlier this year with a pairing of the Op 1 No 1 and *Ghost* Trios plus the *Kakadu* Variations whose exuberance and clarity more than exemplified the qualities of 'verve and poise' that Hannah Nepil, reviewing their Tchaikovsky in these pages in 2016, found in this excellent Copenhagen-based trio. Now comes the 'difficult second album' of any complete cycle, and by pairing the *Ghost*'s neglected twin Op 70 No 2 with the least-played of the Op 1 set, the G major second, they've not given themselves an easy sell.

In fact, it adds up to a thoroughly beguiling programme. Trio Con Brio deliver brisk readings, buoyant with dance rhythms and understated wit (I enjoyed violinist Soo-Jin Hong's slide back into the recapitulation of the first movement of Op 1 No 2). The ensemble is intimate and properly chamber-sized, and Orchid's sound captures it well. If there's slightly too much bloom on the piano, at the expense (as is often the case with piano

trios) of Soo-Kyung Hong's cello tone, it does at least let the delicate, bell-like clarity of pianist Jens Elvekjaer's right hand really sparkle.

That makes for a piquant contrast with the warm, slightly leisurely approach that Trio Con Brio take to the first three movements of both works. If the *poco sostenuto* introduction of Op 70 No 2 felt just right in its combination of stasis and latent energy, the Scherzo of Op 1 No 2 is positively languid. But in the finales of both works, all three players really ignite: explosive in Op 70 No 2; crackling with energy and precision in the Haydn-esque *moto perpetuo* that ends Op 1 No 2. Their forthcoming *Archduke* is going to be well worth a listen. **Richard Bratby**

Brahms

Cello Sonatas^a - No 1, Op 38; No 2, Op 99.

Five Piano Pieces, Op 76

Kate Bennett Wadsworth vc **Yi-heng Yang** pf

Deux-Elles Ⓜ DXL1181 (67' • DDD)



Just a few months ago, I reviewed a disc by Leila Schayegh and Jan Schultsz (Glossa, 10/18) that took Brahms's violin sonatas to the next level of historically informed performance practice through the violinist's extensive use of portamento, the pianist's free arpeggiation of chords and a remarkably elastic approach to rhythm and tempo, in addition to the typical concerns of period instrumentation and vibrato. Now, here are Kate Bennett Wadsworth and Yi-heng Yang, who take a nearly identical tack with the cello sonatas. Both recordings are based on new Bärenreiter editions by the musicologist Clive Brown, in fact.

Schayegh and Schultsz's relatively radical approach, while yielding appreciable expressive gains, also turned out to be something of a double-edged sword – and the same must be said here. Yang's rolled chords at the opening of Op 38 set a bardic



Beautifully controlled: Natalie Clein plays the cello version of Rebecca Clarke's Viola Sonata alongside other British works

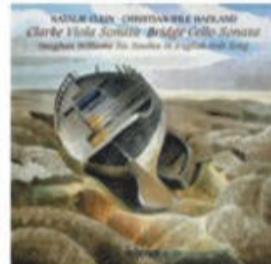
tone, for instance, and both musicians' flexibility in terms of tempo helps them intensify this narrative quality of their interpretation as the movement progresses. Listen, for instance, to their passionate rhapsodising at 7'40", then the dreamy fragility they bring to the coda – and note, too, the touching effect of Wadsworth's portamento. Yes, their tempo at the end is daringly slow, yet they manage to hold it together. That's not always the case, however. They have a tendency to broaden at major structural joins, which can contort the music's architecture, and often their freedom leads to smudging of detail, as often happens throughout Op 99.

It's not specified in the notes what instrument Wadsworth uses but her tone is reedy and at times almost gaunt. Yang plays a lovely 1875 Viennese Streicher piano. I find her loose-limbed playing of selections from Op 76 can work against Brahms's intentions, as I see them anyway. There's not much *agitato* in the first piece, for example, and the second is lumpily phrased; one feels the beats too strongly. But the fourth flows urgently and the instrument naturally spotlights the lovely tenor countermelody.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Bridge · Clarke · Vaughan Williams

Bridge Cello Sonata. Scherzo. Serenade. Spring Song Clarke Viola Sonata Vaughan Williams Six Studies in English Folk Song
Natalie Clein vc Christian Ihle Hadland pf
 Hyperion © CDA68253 (60' • DDD)



Hands up: I hadn't realised that Rebecca Clarke had authorised a cello version of her much-recorded Viola Sonata, although it has in fact been recorded by at least two cellists. But still, I suspect that this beautifully produced recital from Natalie Clein and Christian Ihle Hadland will be many listeners' first encounter with the cello version of this superb work, and I strongly suspect that they'll be as impressed by it as I was.

The sonata reveals several new facets when played on the cello, the principal one being the new depth and physicality of the sound world. Clein makes the most of that, with a tonal palette that ranges from thick charcoal-black to muted

pastels, beautifully controlled and shaped in the service of Clarke's ardent musical narrative. The first movement is headed *Impetuoso* and throughout this disc Clein and Hadland never stint on commitment.

In the second movement of Bridge's wartime Cello Sonata, for example, the transition from uneasy calm to jagged, angst-ridden turmoil and on to soaring, impassioned lyricism is handled with poetry and passion. Clein is never afraid to let you hear the rasp of bow on string, and Hadland, too, knows how to make a climax thrillingly sonorous without overwhelming his partner.

Around these two imposing central performances, the pair unerringly find the right atmosphere for each of the various miniatures by Vaughan Williams and Bridge; catching the wit of Bridge's Scherzo and the lilt of his Serenade as well as the sense of lengthening shadows that lies behind all that melodic charm. The acoustic is lucid, natural and intimate: excellent booklet notes by Paul Hindmarsh and cover art by Eric Ravilious are simply the icing on the cake. **Richard Bratby**

GRAMOPHONE Collector

GILDED GOLDBERGS

Jed Distler listens to three very different treatments of Bach's Goldberg Variations, from the relatively familiar to the highly unusual



Henning Kragerud and the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra play Bach in a string arrangement

Despite their keyboard provenance, more and more ensembles, arrangers, remixers, improvisers and composers claim Bach's *Goldberg Variations* as their own. As such, perhaps it's no surprise that Dmitry Sitkovetsky's 1984 string trio arrangement has long passed from engaging novelty to repertoire staple, with numerous recordings to consider, including the present release from Dux.

The recording runs to nearly twice the length of Sitkovetsky's 2012 remake (Nimbus, 5/13): these three musicians observe all of the repeats (including the *Aria da capo*), and favour more measured tempos in slower variations, stretching out the celebrated 'Black Pearl' (Var 25) to just under 10 minutes, and the lyrical Var 13 to a protracted eight minutes plus. Their interpretation reflects the influence of period performance in regard to its astringent timbres, frequent avoidance of vibrato and a tendency to impose dynamic swells on certain sustained notes, which causes the contrapuntal texture to lose focus. Their mincing Var 17 (the canon at the sixth) and Var 2 prove this point when heard alongside the brisker, leaner and more clearly delineated Rachlin/Imai/Maisky recording (DG, 4/07). And surely the latter's rhythmic spring and lightness of being throughout Var 5's rapid passagework puts this heavier, thicker reading at a disadvantage, with its basic tempo slightly slowing down as the movement progresses. How austere

and humourless Var 24 (the canon at the octave) sounds next to the graceful lilt in both of Sitkovetsky's trio recordings. Granted, there are lovely moments, such as the eerily disembodied sound world the musicians conjure in Var 22, plus the assertive dotted rhythms in their well-balanced readings of Vars 7 and 26. But the competition speaks for itself.

A new string arrangement by Bernt Simen Lund and Henning Kragerud effectively incorporates concerto grosso principles in its effective division of labour between section soloists and full ensemble. I'll cite several examples: Var 21 (the canon at the seventh) presents the first 'A' section with soloists, then *tutti* strings on the repeat and the 'B' section's first time through, with just the soloists again for the repeat of 'B'. Var 16 (the French overture) also begins with soloists, yet soon fills out with musicians. Some choices are not to my taste, such as a chromium-plated legato sheen worthy of Mantovani in the Var 30 Quodlibet, or those tastelessly precious sudden dynamic dips in Var 7. Whether Bach would have applied such liberal doses of pizzicato is debatable, yet he would have respected the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra's glorious execution of them, particularly in the 'all-pizz' Var 19's stunningly calibrated phrasing.

The *Goldbergs* are followed by Kragerud's own variations inspired by the life and works of the Finnish poet, author and librettist Zachris Topelius. While the music's conservative style lies

more in the late 19th/early 20th century than the early 21st century, Kragerud's skilful and varied string-writing is matched by his fluent development of ideas and his use of brief pauses between variations as pivots towards surprises, including an unexpectedly quiet, slightly dissonant coda that seemingly ends in mid-air. And with Kragerud at the helm, one assumes that this vividly polished performance addresses the composer's wishes to a proverbial T.

Peter Navarro-Alonso doesn't so much 'recompose' the *Goldbergs* as much as he ingenuously appropriates and tailors the text to Alpha's unusual multi-recorder/saxophone/percussion line-up, while exploiting their resources to the hilt. While Navarro-Alonso doesn't change even one of Bach's notes, he takes matters of voice-leading and registration into his own hands. His frequent use of mallet instruments imbues the music with a light-hearted, almost cartoonish character, especially in the pixie-like Var 7, where a glockenspiel and sopranino recorder glide in the stratosphere. The rounded detached articulation of the saxophone and recorder transform Var 11's scales into gently trickling melodies that are offset by percussive punctuation.

Also notice the evocative register extremes in Var 13 between the sopranino recorder and the marimba's low notes, together with ratchet rejoinders in between phrase statements. The canon at the sixth (Var 17) seems to melt under the weight of Navarro-Alonso's slow and soft conception, yet the combination of bass marimba and baritone saxophone in Var 25 hauntingly brings out the music's underlying desolation. By contrast, the Quodlibet's wacky cymbal-bashing would have been an apt accompaniment to the composer and his family boisterously singing around the dinner table. My writer colleague Tim Page once hosted a radio show called *New, Old and Unexpected*, and that title aptly sums up Navarro-Alonso's quirky, imaginative and original reimagining of the *Goldbergs*. **G**

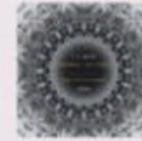
THE RECORDINGS



JS Bach Goldberg Variations
King-Fender, Mrožek-Loska, Fender
DUX **F** ② DUX1488/9



JS Bach Goldberg Variations, etc
Arctic Philh CO / Kragerud
Simax **F** PSC1353



JS Bach Goldberg Variations
Alpha
Dacapo **F** 8 226210

Górecki

String Quartets - No 1, 'Already it is dusk', Op 62; No 2, 'Quasi una fantasia', Op 64.
Genesis I: Elementi, Op 19 No 1
Tippett Quartet
Naxos M 8 573919 (61' • DDD)



Górecki's string quartets are fundamental to understanding his output, even though the first dates from 1988, his 55th year, and 12 years after the *succès de scandale* of the Symphony No 3. It is a work of extraordinary power, negotiating between the profoundest calm and material that anyone whose knowledge of the composer is limited to the Third Symphony might conceivably find shockingly violent. This is to misread Górecki, however. The reason for the apparent stasis of the symphony is precisely the blackness of the texts it sets; a reaction to them founded in violence would serve no purpose.

With a string quartet – generally speaking – there is no text, but there may well be a subtext, and that is provided here by the derivation of the musical material from a work by the early Polish Renaissance composer Szamotuł, a setting of a prayer for sleeping children. As Richard Whitehouse points out in his notes, references to childhood appear more and more frequently in the composer's later work, and one might suppose the astoundingly visceral quality of certain parts of this quartet to be nightmarish. Certainly they provide nothing in the nature of consolatory sentimentalism.

The Quartet No 2, dating from 1991 and subtitled *Quasi una fantasia*, might similarly confound certain expectations. Quite apart from its specific evocation of Beethoven (and particularly the piano sonatas of Op 27), the sheer scale of the piece – in this recording it lasts just under 33 minutes – is enough to suggest that this is chamber music writ large. Górecki's symphonic experience is indeed brought to bear on the medium of the string quartet in a work that plumbs the blackest depths of despair, scales the heights of luminous hope and finally leaves us with a question mark.

There are other outstanding recordings of these works, by the Royal String Quartet on Hyperion and the Kronos Quartet (for whom they were written and to whom they are dedicated) on Nonesuch, but the Tippetts not only provide renditions of equal stature, missing no nuance of either extreme calm or intransigent violence, but

Naxos's recording is as clear as a bell. We are given, in addition, *Elementi* for string trio (1962), the first of the *Genesis* cycle, a work hewn from stone but performed here with silken delicacy. This is a recording deserving of the very highest recommendation. **Ivan Moody**

Selected comparisons:

Kronos Qt (9/91^R, 4/93) (NONE) 7559 79319-2

Royal Qt (6/11) (HYPE) CDA67812

Kuula

Violin Sonatas - Op 1; in F. Elä itke impeni nuori.
Kesälta. Pieces - Op 3a; Op 22. Pohjalainen tanssi. Ut min väg i världen går
Nina Karmon vn Oliver Triendl pf
CPO © CPO555 148-2 (71' • DDD)

Kuula

'Complete Works for Solo Piano'
Adam Johnson pf
Grand Piano © GP780 (80' • DDD)



The year 1918 marked the centenary of the death of Toivo Kuula, shot in an argument aged 35 (ironically, his surname means 'bullet'). He was one of the most talented composers of the generation after Sibelius (with whom he studied in 1906-08) and a potentially major chamber music composer, as anyone who knows his near hour-long Piano Trio (BIS) will know.

Of the works on these two discs, only the E minor Violin Sonata (1907) is on a substantial scale, not quite half an hour long. The spirit of Finnish folk music pervades the work, combined in the finale's climactic fugato episode with a contrapuntal rigour to impressive effect. Quite why the F major Sonata (1906) did not progress beyond its first movement is unclear, but its very existence was unknown until the manuscript's discovery two decades ago. Of similar vintage but entirely different mien are the Five Pieces, Op 3a, written piecemeal during 1905-07. A mixed bunch of original miniatures (Lullaby, Notturno) and arrangements, they could be grouped just as easily with the other stand-alone transcriptions here. The Two Pieces, Op 22 ('Chanson sans paroles' of 1910 and 'Suru', written two years later), make a more effective diptych. The performances are committed and well prepared, Nina Karmon's tone bright and warm, and Oliver Triendl's accompaniments sensitive. Fine sound, too.

Kuula's complete piano music can – just – be accommodated on a single CD, which is what Adam Johnson has managed for Grand Piano. Once again, there is a mix of larger sets – the Opp 3b and 26 Pieces (1906-08 and 1913-16 respectively), neither of them cycles in the proper sense, plus the *Three Folk-Tale Pictures* (*Satukuvia*, 1912), which most definitely is – and his well-known but overlong *Festive March* (1910; concision is not a lesson he learnt from Sibelius!), with a smattering of miniatures and transcriptions. The programme as a whole is suffused with charm and in Adam Johnson's sympathetic performances is immensely listenable to, whether the early Invention in E minor (c1905 – this really was a favoured key of his), or the *Folk-Tale Pictures* with its French influence. It's a shame he never composed a piano sonata. Well worth investigating. **Guy Rickards**

Ruzicka

Clouds 2^a. String Quartet No 7,
'... possible-à-chaque-instant'
Mingue Quartet; ^aDeutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Peter Ruzicka
Neos © NEOS11808 (61' • DDD)



Composer, conductor and administrator, Peter Ruzicka is certainly among the most versatile of present-day musicians and this latest release updates the story with regard to his music for string quartet (the initial six quartets and sundry pieces having already appeared on a two-disc set – NEOS10822/3).

Extended from an earlier work, *Clouds 2* (2013) takes its cue from 'Der ferne Klang' – not in terms of Schreker's opera but of that 'distant sound', whose imagining runs through German late Romanticism and early modernism. Quartet and orchestra interact not as a concerto grosso but rather a process of growing confrontation prior to the transfigured yet unresolved close.

The Seventh Quartet (2016) investigates an evolution determined not by an ultimate goal but by what is 'possible at any moment' (hence the subtitle). Beethoven's C sharp minor Quartet, Op 131, is a precedent, even if the eight sections of the present piece are not definable movements but episodes conveying motifs and ideas (by Ruzicka and others) in an open-ended concept that seems intent on offering up fresh possibilities right through to the tensely resigned ending.

Superb playing from the Minguet Quartet and, in the earlier work, the Deutsches SO. Anyone new to Ruzicka might head to one of the orchestral discs (NEOS11101 with *Mahler/Bild* and *Trans* is a good starting point), while those who have the earlier quartets should acquire this. **Richard Whitehouse**

Schubert · Burgmüller

Burgmüller Two Nocturnes Schubert

Arpeggione Sonata, D821. Fischerweise, D881. Meeres Stille, D216. Die Nacht, Ddeest. Nacht und Träume, D827. Rosamunde, D797 - Romanze. Winterreise, D911 - No 24, Der Leiermann

Anja Lechner vc Pablo Márquez gtr

ECM New Series F 481 7172 (56' • DDD)

Schubert

Arpeggione Sonata, D821. Duo Sonata, D574.

Sonatina No 1, D384

Duo KeMi (Daniel Migdal vn Jacob Kellermann gtr)

BIS F BIS2375 (61' • DDD/DSD)



The arpeggione was a hybrid instrument, smooth-waisted, tuned and fretted like guitar but bowed like a viola da gamba. Invented in the 1820s, its vogue was so brief that it is remembered only by a single work, Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata. That, of course, is nowadays only ever played in transcription – usually for cello or viola – so further adaptation away from the original cannot be considered beyond the pale.

Coincidentally, two new recordings appear in which the accompaniment has been transferred to the guitar. There is authentic precedent for such an exercise: Schubert himself played the guitar and a number of his songs were circulated with accompaniments arranged for the instrument. It is largely with songs that Anja Lechner and Pablo Márquez couple the sonata, demonstrating the vocal inspiration that is the basis of so much of Schubert's instrumental music. Daniel Migdal and Jacob Kellermann appropriate the sonata for violin and guitar, and couple it with similar arrangements of the Duo Sonata and the first of the earlier Sonatinas, placing the sound world of the Arpeggione Sonata closer to Schubert's other accompanied instrumental music.

Lechner and Márquez's disc is called 'Die Nacht', after a recently discovered

song that exists in a version for voice and guitar. The overall feel of their collection is duly nocturnal, with gentler songs and rippling accompaniments providing a gentle listen. Then there's a haunting 'Die Leiermann', the cello breaking the mood with an eerie *ponticello* drone.

If the ECM disc is predominantly lyrical, the BIS selection responds more vividly to the unfolding drama of sonata form, with lighter articulation and a firmer sense of architecture. Perhaps the tempos in the Duo Sonata's central movements are constrained by the problems introduced when transferring piano parts to the guitar but the playing itself is of the highest order, the programme satisfying from start to finish. The ingenious arrangements are by Kellermann himself and, for the Sonatina, Mats Bergström; we have to assume from ECM's characteristically otherworldly documentation that Lechner and Márquez provided their own. **David Thrasher**

A Sierra

Avian Mirrors^a. Butterflies Remember a Mountain^b. Counting-Out Rhyme^c. Of Risk and Memory^d. True^e

^bNicola Benedetti, ^aJesse Mills vns ^bLeonard

Elschenbroich, ^{ac}Raman Ramakrishnan vcs

^cRieko Aizawa, ^bAlexei Grynyuk pfs

^dQuattro Mani; ^eJorszowski Trio

Bridge F BRIDGE9506 (58' • DDD)



When Bridge champions a composer, one needs to sit up and take notice: the series devoted to George Crumb, Fred Lerdahl and Poul Ruders provide eloquent testimony of that. Arlene Sierra, American-born in 1970 but long resident in the UK, is another in the company's focus and this third volume (the first was released in 2011, the second – of orchestral works – three years later) is a wonderful chamber music issue that enthrals from first bar to last.

The title-work is Sierra's second piano trio, *Butterflies Remember a Mountain* (2013). The piece has garnered much critical admiration (7/16) and was written for the players performing it here, Nicola Benedetti, Leonard Elschenbroich and Alexei Grynyuk. Many of Sierra's works derive inspiration from the natural world and its fauna (readers may recall the premiere in 2017 of her *Nature Symphony*, a part-reworking of this trio), and this is no exception. There is a Takemitsu-

like conceit to its title, the three movements titled respectively 'Butterflies', 'Remember' and 'A Mountain', and the music has a Japanese exquisiteness and restrained power.

Sierra's first trio, *Truel* (2002-04), is of a markedly different character, a duel between the three players (hence the title), combative and utterly compelling. So, too, is the violin-and-cello duet *Avian Mirrors* (2013), a fascinating non-Messiaenic triptych on birdsong that lingers long in the memory. *Counting-Out Rhyme* (2002) and the closing piano duet, *Of Risk and Memory* (1997), are both beguiling and broaden her frame of reference and instrumental palette. The performances are all first-rate; the recorded sound – from three different locations and dates – is beautifully engineered. Very strongly recommended.

Guy Rickards

'The Scene of the Crime'

Börtz Dialogo 4 - Ricordo Broström Dream

Variations Dean ... the scene of the crime ...

Duddell Catch Jolivet Heptade

Håkan Hardenberger tpt Colin Currie perc

Colin Currie Records F CCR0002 (68' • DDD)



No 'difficult second album' for Colin Currie's new record label but instead a worthy successor to the label's imposing inauguration (with Reich's *Drumming* – 5/18) – a delectable combination of works for trumpeter and percussionist for which Currie is joined by Håkan Hardenberger. Most of the works were written for the two but the disc opens with a classic of the combination: André Jolivet's exacting *Heptade* of 1971.

Rehearsing with Hardenberger, writes Currie in the booklet, is 'intense' (few words are spoken, apparently), while performances are 'zones of feverish intensity'. This delicate and daring performance gives a clear impression of two musicians for whom verbal communication might well be less fertile than musical. The approach, in which instruments often associated with brash directness sound elusively poetic and mysterious, links arms with the elegance and erudition in Jolivet's writing.

Those qualities are to the fore again in Tobias Broström's somnambulant *Dream Variations*, in which distillation allows for new forms of integration between the instrumental groups. Another Swede, Daniel Börtz, proves in *Dialogo 4 - Ricordo*



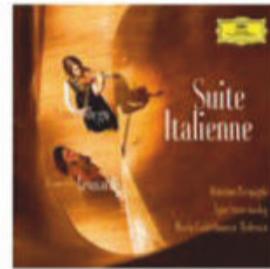
Delectable combination: Colin Currie is joined by trumpeter Håkan Hardenberger in a collection of works mostly written for them

that the human vocal characteristics he so often unlocks in inanimate instruments are possible there in Currie's skins as much as in Hardenberger's trumpet. There is more tension in this journey and we feel the frequent stand-offs between the musicians. Brett Dean's ... *the scene of the crime* ... refers to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (and is associated with Dean's opera but doesn't share any material), specifically the 'trumpet and drums' that are referenced in the text. It moves from desolation to a grooving dance, like the emergence of cooperative reasoning that is so elusive in the play. In between all these, Joe Duddell's more obvious but no less interesting *Catch* is a tonic, and contains some of the most slyly brilliant playing of all. The album is captivating whether in joy or pain.

Andrew Mellor

'Suite italienne'

Castelnuovo-Tedesco Ballade, Op 107. Two Fantasias from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. **Violetta**: Fantasia from *La traviata* **Respighi** Violin Sonata **Stravinsky** Suite italienne **Francesca Dego vn Francesca Leonardi pf** DG 481 7297 (73' • DDD)



The cover photos suggest glamour; the first item in the programme is romantic with a capital R. But don't be misled by appearances. The main story here isn't Respighi's B minor Violin Sonata or even Stravinsky's violin-and-piano arrangement of movements from *Pulcinella*, the *Suite italienne* that gives the disc its title. It's the presence of three premiere recordings of works for violin and piano by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco: the Ballade that he composed in exile 1940 for Tossy Spivakovsky and two of his delightful virtuoso operatic fantasies – *Rosina*, based on *The Barber of Seville*, and *Violetta*, a three and a half-minute micro-rhapsody on ideas from *La traviata*.

So while Francesca Dego's stainless-steel tone makes for an episodic and uningratiating account of the Respighi (and sounds oddly artificial against the slightly backward miking of Francesca Leonardi's piano – not that a Fazioli would have been my first choice of instrument

for this particular piece), it's exactly what's called for in the brooding, Chopin-inspired Ballade. And it's positively delicious in the two previously unrecorded operatic fantasies, as well as the more familiar *Figaro* (also based on Rossini). Dego dashes and darts: she dispatches her fireworks with aristocratic hauteur. Leonardi is with her all the way and the slightly dry recording helps bring out Castelnuovo-Tedesco's tangy bitonal harmonies.

Played poker-faced, the Stravinsky is a winner too. Savour the velvet tread of Leonardi's Minuetto – and Dego's chewy, mouth-wateringly tart double-stops. The booklet notes are admirably thorough, and the centrefold shows both Stravinsky and Castenluovo-Tedesco grinning like cats who got the cream, as well they might. When this disc is good, it's very good; when it's not – well, you won't be buying it for the Respighi anyway.

Richard Bratby

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Eduard Melkus

Now aged 90, the Viennese violinist and viola player has enjoyed success in the company of some great early music pioneers. Tully Potter writes about some of his many achievements

Eduard Melkus ranks as one of the great Viennese violinists (and no mean viola player), possessed of a plangent tone and a *gemütlich* style even in old music. Although he barely plays now (he recently turned 90), he is anything but a back number. On the telephone he bubbles with ideas, including a Beethoven project which he hopes will come to fruition in the next 'Beethoven Year', 2020: an opera with spoken dialogue on the Dido story, linking some of the composer's neglected early vocal compositions to Italian texts. 'I am looking for a producer,' he says.

Melkus was born at Baden near Vienna on September 1, 1928, into a family who all played music, mostly the piano, for pleasure. 'It was against the family tradition to become professional. Musicians were considered a little bit like vagabonds – which we are!' Given an old violin as a toy at the age of four, he started the piano at six but soon wanted a real violin and learnt first with a Viennese pupil of Ševčík. He speaks with warmth of subsequent teachers Ernst Moravec ('He could play all the concertos better than we could'), the Ysaye pupil Firmin Touche ('I owe a lot to him'), the Russian Alexander Schaichet ('We were very close friends') and Peter Rybar ('Wonderful').

Mentors were the musical polymaths Bruno Sonneck and especially Josef Mertin, 'my guide and friend, a fine singer – he could sing Bach cantatas – full of life, temperament and real musicality'. Mertin's repertoire reached back to Pérotin and Machaut. In 1949, Melkus heard violinist Adolf Busch's first concerts in Vienna since 1936: 'We awaited him like a messiah.' Later he befriended violinist Rudolf Kolisch, impressed that his bookshelves were full of, for instance, literature on the architecture of Adolf Loos.

In 1950, Melkus participated in Mertin's Vienna CO recordings of Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*, alongside co-pioneers Nikolaus Harnoncourt

(cello), Gustav Leonhardt (viola da gamba), Edith Steinbauer (violin/viola) and wind playing siblings Jürg and Elisabeth Schaeftlein. The performances improved on Busch's 1935 versions by using a harpsichord (Bruno Seidlhofer) and recorders and playing No 6 one-to-a-part, but regressed in employing multiple strings for No 3 and lacking Busch's rhythmic flair. Melkus, who played first viola in No 6 and recalls taking the violin solos in Nos 1, 2, 4 and 5, did even better when recording Bach's violin concertos with perfectly judged tempos in 1971 (the Double Concerto with Spiros Rantos).

Melkus was not restricted to early music, also playing

Bartók's Viola Concerto and the violin concertos by Berg, Reger (rather cut), Schumann (his own edition) and Wellesz, which he premiered in 1962. He learnt about conducting by listening to his friend Hans Swarowsky teach. He became a regular visitor to Britain and the US, teaching in Illinois and Georgia and leading a quartet and string ensemble. Recordings document his partnerships with keyboardists Lionel Salter, Paul Badura-Skoda (lovely Mozart sonatas) and Huguette Dreyfus, 'a marvellous musician, a marvellous woman', whom he met by accident in Paris.

For his Archiv records Melkus was lucky to have a c1760 Aegidius Klotz violin in unaltered state, as well as a restored 1679 Nicolò Amati, and even luckier to find several old bows. He also had other Baroque violins, a Guarneri copy for modern music and an old Czech viola (many instruments, but fortunately not his favourites, were stolen in a burglary). Over the years, he and his various ensemble colleagues – leading members of Vienna's orchestras – met with opprobrium from the Baroque thought police for their vibrato, metal-wound strings (although Melkus had used gut extensively), modern pitch (accurate, he says, for olden-times Vienna), chin rests and shoulder rests.

Proofs of the pudding include his knowledge and sinuous execution of Baroque and Classical ornaments

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1943 – Begins studies in Vienna

Violin and viola until 1953 with Ernst Moravec, viola player with the Schneiderhan Quartet. Musicology with Erich Schenk at Vienna University (1951–53); further violin studies with Firmin Touche in Paris (1953)

• 1946 – Begins association with Mertin

Becomes concertmaster of Mertin's Collegium Musicum, and in 1949 forms Vienna Viola da Gamba Quartet with Mertin disciples Alfred Altenburger, Alice Hoffelner (later Harnoncourt) and Nikolaus Harnoncourt. In 1952, with Mertin, Gustav Leonhardt and Karl Scheit, forms Vienna Schola Antiqua

• 1955 – Moves to Switzerland

Leads New Zurich Quartet until 1958. Works with the orchestras in Zurich and Winterthur as principal viola. Studies violin with Alexander Schaichet (1956) and Peter Rybar (1958)

• 1958 – Academy professor

Violin, baroque violin and viola professor at Vienna Academy. Lectures about style and interpretation in performing string music

• 1965 – Founds Vienna Capella Academica

A small Baroque orchestra which he usually leads from the first violin desk, or stands to lead in concertos. Makes his first recordings for DG Archiv



The proofs of the pudding are Melkus's beautiful tone, unfailingly musical phrasing, subtle rhythm, and knowledge and sinuous execution of Baroque and Classical ornaments. Preparing a single performance might entail visits to several libraries. Working on Archiv's monumental Tanzmusik collection, he persuaded librarians to let him try out dances from manuscripts, then consulted Vienna State Opera dancers for the right tempos. His set of Corelli's Op 5 Violin Sonatas with Dreyfus (and other continuo players) has ornaments gleaned from Corelli, Geminiani and others; accompaniments are delightfully varied; and No 7 is done in Geminiani's concerto

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Biber Mystery (Rosary) Sonatas
Eduard Melkus vn
Huguette Dreyfus hpd **Lionel Rogg org**
Hans-Jürg Lange bn **Karl Scheit lute**
Gerald Sonneck vc and va da gamba
Alfred Planyavsky violone
 Archiv Produktion (9/68)
 Recorded Vienna, March 1967

grosso arrangement. It is fascinating to compare Melkus's 1966 interpretations of Tartini and Nardini concertos with his teacher Rybar's beautiful 1950–52 accounts of Tartini's D minor and Nardini's E minor (arranged from a lost sonata). Both versions get under the skin of the music, but Melkus adds authentic ornamentation in the slow movements.

Melkus loves giving concerts in art galleries, and his conversation is sprinkled with such names as Titian and Leonardo. I am not the only one who finds his epoch-making 1967 recordings of Biber's highly pictorial *Mystery (Rosary)* Sonatas still the most moving and involving. **G**

Instrumental



Jeremy Nicholas listens to Liszt and Schumann in an unusual coupling:

'There is much to admire in Weder's Schumann, not least the intimate fireside atmosphere' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



Jed Distler immerses himself in a double dose of anniversary Debussy:

'Perianes unleashes the waves of arpeggios with little help from the sustain pedal: unorthodox but convincing' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**

JS Bach

JS Bach Concerto nach italienischem Gusto, BWV971. Keyboard Partita No 4, BWV828

JS Bach/Busoni Chaconne

Federico Colli pf

Chandos ® CHAN20079 (60' • DDD)



My last encounter with Federico Colli was a slightly frustrating one, with

his readings of Scarlatti at times seeming overly interventionist. But what shines through this new Bach disc is a sense of musical daring; imagination, too; and sincerity by the bucketful, not just at the keyboard but also in his soul-baring notes.

He brings to the Ouverture of the Fourth Partita a compelling sense of grandeur, while the fast writing combines buoyancy with absolute clarity in the counterpoint, with myriad shifts of dynamics and phrasing. Those shifts are something of a Colli trademark and where they work well, as here, they can be very striking. But in places he can sound a little contrived – the Allemande, for instance, in which it seems as if every phrase is given a different *tinta*, an effect taken to further extremes in the repeats, and the Menuet, which sounds merely mannered. But the Aria is charming, if not quite conjuring the otherworldly intimacy of Richard Goode or the sublime simplicity of Murray Perahia. The Sarabande is a highlight on this new recording, full of iridescent beauty. And Colli's revealing of the inner working of the Gigue is utterly compelling.

The *Italian Concerto* suits him well – the easy virtuosity of the first movement is full of interest, while the finale abounds in fascinating touches and avoids becoming a mere speedfest. In between, he gives a rapturous account of the *Andante*.

He ends with the mighty Bach/Busoni Chaconne. This is again full of Colli fingerprints – an ability to withdraw the sound to a mere whisper, the sense of constantly experimenting with textures

and phrasing, sometimes resulting in losing the wood for the trees. Busoni once wrote of wanting to remove, in his transcriptions, 'the dust of tradition ... I try to restore them to their youth'. In Colli's hands there's occasionally a danger that the original becomes entirely unrecognisable: to my mind, central to this reworking of the Chaconne is Busoni's grandeur of vision, a quality that sometimes gets lost in the excitement of the moment. The drama is contained within the score itself, yet Colli sometimes adds to it needlessly, creating something overly Romantic. That said, there are many ravishing and compelling moments in his reading, and he has not only an epic technique but boundless imagination too. Just occasionally, though, I wanted him to rein things in a little.

Nevertheless, there's no doubt that Colli is one of the more original thinkers of his generation. **Harriet Smith**

Partita No 4 – selected comparisons:

Goode (3/99) (NONE) 7559 79483-2

Perahia (7/08) (SONY) 88697 22695-2

► See *The Musician and the Score* on page 50

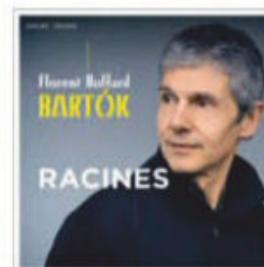
Bartók

'Racines'

Fourteen Bagatelles, Op 6, Sz38. Eight Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs, Op 20 Sz74. Out of Doors, Sz81. Two Romanian Dances, Op 8a Sz43

Florent Boffard pf

Mirare ® MIR410 (59' • DDD)



Florent Boffard's credentials as an exponent of modern music are impeccable and well known, as are his recordings. It may be worth noting here, however, that though he was on the faculties of the Lyon and Stuttgart Conservatories, since 2016 he has been on the faculty of the Paris Conservatoire.

His welcome new Bartók disc for Mirare typifies his extraordinarily refined and cultivated pianism, as penetrating in

Chopin as it is in Boulez or Berio. The Fourteen Bagatelles, which Bartók himself considered a sort of gateway to his mature work, are given a performance which is a marvel of subtlety, hypersensitivity to every indication in the score and acutely vivid imagination. The tonal palette is infinitely calibrated, the rhythmical acumen a wonder of lithe flexibility. Boffard traces a seamless line, from the abstract directional graph of No 1 through the slightly idiotic Waltz of No 14, which creates a sense of rare cohesion throughout the set, with humour always winking from the wings. Offhand, I cannot think of a finer performance.

The two big *Romanian Dances* fairly burst with vitality, even if they are faster than they could be conceivably danced, even by dervishes on amphetamines. As for the two big suites, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs* and *Out of Doors*, I simply can't decide which I like best, even after repeated listening: the pliant rhythms, finely wrought *parlando* rubato and delicate voicing of astonishingly harmonically complex chords combine to create luminously captivating textures. This full-voiced, deeply breathing, humanly dimensional Bartók is the one I've been waiting for. Now, let's have more! **Patrick Rucker**

Beethoven · Liszt

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 32, Op 111^a **Liszt**

Années de pèlerinage - année 1: Suisse, S160^b

Till Fellner pf

ECM New Series ® 481 6837 (76' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^bMusikverein, Vienna, June 10, 2002; ^aMahaney Center for the Arts, Middlebury, VT, October 9, 2010



This recording combines two live performances by Till Fellner: the Swiss *Année* in the Great Hall of the Vienna Musikverein (June 2002) and Op 111 at Middlebury College, Vermont



Like a throwback to a different time: Garrick Ohlsson brings his years of experience to late Brahms

(October 2010). Despite the venues' acoustic attributes, microphone placement seems distant in both cases and one could wish for a more crisply defined sound. The performances, on the other hand, are of a calibre that fully justifies the release of this compelling disc by a pianist whose relatively few recordings belie the magnitude of his gifts.

The Swiss *Année* is all the obvious things one hopes it to be: exquisitely captured memories of mighty snow-capped precipices, flocks grazing green meadows dotted with flowers, the glass surfaces of tranquil glacier lakes, bracingly pure air, astonishing aural environments that echo and amplify, constantly altering play of light, senses enraptured amid nature's terror and beauty.

This is where Fellner parts company with the best of his colleagues to pursue a path leading to another level entirely. What we hear is what is on the page, plain, clear, concise. At no point does Fellner allow himself to edge in front of Liszt. He doesn't bang. Neither elaborate rubatos, extraneous agogic signifiers nor pianistic figuration, however finely executed, moves the music forward; harmony, polyphony, and melodic

contours do. As a result Liszt emerges bold, direct, uncompromising and almost overwhelmingly powerful.

Tears in the much abused 'Vallée d'Obermann' are mopped up, and a young superhero stands proudly on dry ground. In place of histrionics, Fellner articulates this message of delivery from inner tumult to redemption through the magnificence of nature with integrity and shining poetic eloquence, evoking ecstasy of trembling authenticity. The forthright simplicity of rustic shepherds' songs is captured in 'Eglogue' with irresistible lilt and charm. Alpine horns resounding through the valleys in 'Le mal du pays' and distant bells heard at night in 'Les cloches de Genève' thrillingly conjure uncanny acoustic phenomena, leaving all doors open to Debussy.

In 2008-10 Feller played the entire Beethoven cycle in Vienna, Paris, London, New York and Tokyo. His performance of Op 111 is informed by the same qualities of self-effacement, probative depth and sheer joy in the music that make his Liszt so special. This is important playing of breathtaking finesse and integrity. It will leave you wanting more. **Patrick Rucker**

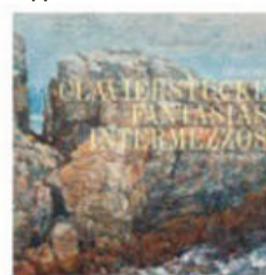
Brahms

Piano Pieces - Op 116; Op 117; Op 118.

Scherzo, Op 4

Garrick Ohlsson pf

Hyperion © CDA68226 (72' • DDD)



Garrick Ohlsson begins his new disc of late Brahms with the mighty Op 116 pieces, and in a sense his readings seem like a throwback to a different time – one when bigger was better, when the full textures were there to be relished and displayed. Ohlsson of course has just the technique to do this, though I have to confess I prefer my Brahms to sound leaner. He relishes the sheer muscularity of the first and third pieces, for instance, but I wanted more intimacy in the middle section of the latter. No 4 is a little studied in effect – especially compared with Richard Goode, who is wonderfully nuanced here. And No 5, with its strange limping rhythm, doesn't quite conjure the otherworldliness that some find (Angelich or Goode, for instance). In the sixth, Ohlsson conveys the requisite gravitas,



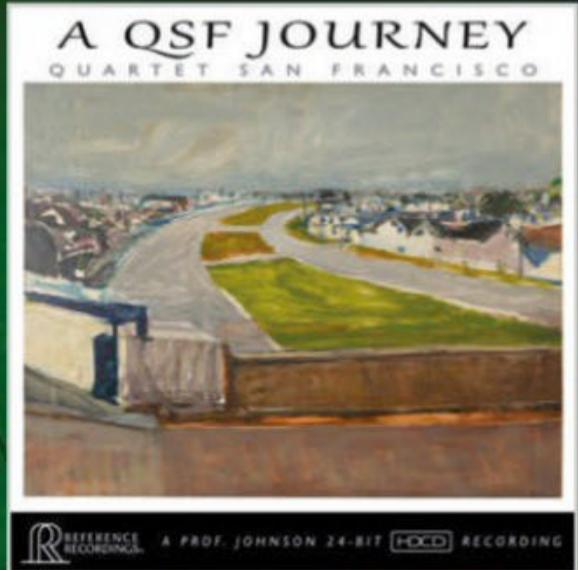
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PHILHARMONIKER
DANIEL BARENBOIM
(CONDUCTOR)
WITH MUSIC BY:
SERGEI PROKOFIEV
GUSTAV MAHLER

BETROTHAL IN A
MONASTERY
SERGEI PROKOFIEV
(1891-1953)
DANIEL BARENBOIM
(MUSICAL DIRECTOR)

yet turn to Angelich and there's a greater flexibility and more interest in the inner voices. But he ends the set with conviction, giving the final Capriccio a bracing kind of desperation.

I'm trying to avoid bludgeoning all new recordings of Brahms's Op 117 and 118 with the mighty example of Volodos, who for me reigns supreme; but, even leaving him aside for the moment, the lullabies that form Op 117, while absolutely acceptable here, don't especially linger in the mind. The magical key-change in the first doesn't quite set the hairs on the back of one's neck a tingle and the simplicity seems more studied than that of Charles Owen on his fine recent disc, while for depth of sonority and colouristic subtlety, Jonathan Plowright (particularly in the third) remains hard to beat, and Freire (Decca, A/17) brings a magnificent humanity to the second.

Op 118 is generally more convincing, the big beefy writing of No 1 suiting Ohlsson's brand of drama, while the songful No 2, which is paced just right, proves that he can, when needs be, retreat to a true *pianissimo*. In No 4, though, others find more whimsy, not least Plowright and Volodos.

But Ohlsson leaves the best till last. The Op 4 Scherzo, written when Brahms was just 18, has a driving excitement, a febrile quality that is thrilling. And, with his easy brand of virtuosity, he sounds right at home here. Plowright is more inclined to play up the Scherzo's Mendelssohnian moments, but of the two, the new account is, I'd say, the better. And Ohlsson is very naturally recorded too. **Harriet Smith**

Opp 117 & 118 – selected comparison:

Volodos (6/17) (SONY) 88875 13019-2

Owen (12/18) (AVIE) AV2397

Op 116 – selected comparisons:

Angelich (4/07) (VIRG) 379302-2

Kozhukhin (5/17) (PENT) PTC5186 568

Goode (NONE) 7559 79154-2

Scherzo & Op 117 – selected comparison:

Plowright (12/14) (BIS) BIS2117

Op 118 – selected comparison:

Plowright (2/16) (BIS) BIS2127

F Couperin

'Couperin l'Alchimiste'

Pièces de clavecin - ordres 3, 4, 11, 19, 20 & 27

Bertrand Cuiller hpd

Harmonia Mundi ® ② HMM90 2375/6 (128' • DDD)



With this two-disc set, Bertrand Cuiller launches a new complete cycle

of the solo harpsichord works of François Couperin that will be supplemented with a selection of vocal, chamber and organ works. Cuiller takes as his theme – a loose one – the idea of the stage, including here six *ordres* that have more or less specific allusions to the theatre or theatrical persona, among them the 11th *ordre* with its magnificent 'five-act' sequence of character sketches lampooning street musicians and entertainers. Subsequent volumes will be organised thematically and with an ear to the colours Cuiller hears in specifics keys and key groupings.

Cuiller's approach is robust and rollicking, appropriately dramatic and alert to Couperin's occasional taste for spectacle. The extended theatrical sequence in the 11th *ordre* is even more muscular and demonstrative than Rousset's version, also for Harmonia Mundi (Cuiller studied with Rousset at the Conservatoire National Supérieur). Cuiller's harpsichord, a 1977 copy of an anonymous 17th-century French instrument, produces a ferocious volume of sound in the third and fifth acts of the minstrelsy suite, leaving no doubt about Couperin's sceptical take on the closed-shop guild of musicians satirised in this collection of miniatures (the spelling of the title was typically transparent and enigmatic: 'Les fastes de la grande et ancienne Mnxstrxndxs').

But it isn't just the vigour of Cuiller's interpretations that delights. In the third act he uses registration to create an appealing and menacing sense of contrast between the left-hand and right-hand dialogue, with the lower octave figures of the *boiteux* or peg-legged line amplified into comic grotesquerie. Compare Cuiller with Kenneth Gilbert's more sober, straightforward rendition and you get a keen sense of the younger musician's intent. Couperin has multiple alter egos and Cuiller is determined to explore all of them.

And yet, it is in those pieces when we think we have the pure Couperin, sentimental, delicate, nuanced and introspective, that Cuiller really finds his voice. The second part of the 'Baccanales' movement from the fourth *ordre* or the 'La fine Madelon' from the 20th *ordre* are particularly appealing, with the harpsichordist seeming to noodle his way through the music with an improvisatory sense of discovery. All of this raises high expectations for the rest of the series.

Philip Kennicott

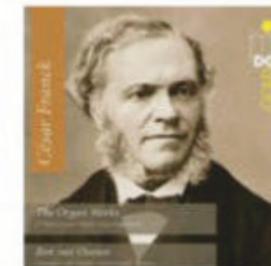
Franck

'The Organ Works'

Ben van Oosten org

Dabringhaus und Grimm ® ④ MDG316 2080-2
(4h 52' • DDD)

Played on the Cavaillé-Coll organ of Saint-Ouen, Rouen



When most recorded versions of Franck's organ music cover two discs, we might question why Ben van Oosten takes four. The answer is not just that his is a most expansive approach, possibly occasioned by the generous acoustic of Saint-Ouen in Rouen (his 28'39" for the *Grand pièce symphonique* seems monumental against 26'22" from Marie-Claire Alain and 26'17" from André Isoir), but that he adds 27 relatively unfamiliar pieces to the big 12 Franck organ works which have been the mainstay of the repertory for well over a century.

These additional pieces are mostly posthumously published organ works, including Franck's earliest organ composition – *Pièce* in E flat of 1846 – and extracts from a collection of 44 organ pieces written between 1858 and 1863. The big question is, are these worth the price of two more discs in the box?

The answer is a resounding yes. Some are admittedly rather dull (*Elévation* in A), others are dull but pack a wonderful punch on this historic organ (*Grand choeur*), and many are very fine works indeed; the boisterous *Sortie* in D cannot fail to bring a spring to the step, while the *Offertoire sur un noël Breton* is five minutes of sheer delight. Despite having clearly been written under the influence of Bach's Passacaglia, the *Offertoire* in F minor is crammed full with emerging Franckisms.

As for the major works, this is not a set to rival either Alain or Isoir, but Oosten brings a disarming eloquence to the *Prélude, Fugue et Variation*; and if his expansive tempos dilute some of the excitement, they allow plenty of breathing space for Franck's hallmark pauses, sustained notes and moments of respite. The change of gear into the *quasi allegretto* of the *Pastorale* is a big beneficiary of this.

Oosten certainly makes generous use of the organ's rich and bountiful resources. Sadly, its wind supply does not always keep up, and there is a ghastly drop in pitch when the manuals come into play after the extended opening pedal solo of the *Final*.

This, though, is a must-have for Franck-ophiles, given the inclusion of so much high-quality but largely obscure material. And few will be disappointed with these strong and expansive performances of the major works or the magnificent sound of this legendary Cavaillé-Coll. **Marc Rochester**

Selected comparisons:

Alain (4/81^R) (APEX) 2564 61428-2

Isoir (DOLC) LDV1768

Liszt • Pärt

Liszt *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, S173 - No 1, Invocation; No 3, Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude; No 4, Pensée des morts; No 6, Hymne de l'enfant à son réveil; No 7, Funérailles; No 9, Andante lagrimoso **Pärt** Für Alina. Pari intervallo. Trivium

Vanessa Wagner pf

La Dolce Volta (F) LDV46 (75' • DDD)



In the booklet interview, Vanessa Wagner says that she long avoided Liszt for,

among other things, his extroversion, brilliance and swagger. Eventually, however, experience with the late works allowed her to make peace with him. On the basis of her new disc of selections from the *Harmonies poétiques*, with three Arvo Pärt pieces interspersed, a fully ratified peace agreement should probably not be drawn up just yet.

From the opening bars of 'Invocation', we are confronted by frenetic rhetoric which, undergirded with a rubato verging on hysteria, threatens incoherence. Any hopes that things may cool down a bit in 'Bénédiction de Dieu' are quickly dashed. Wagner seems unable to let the music speak for itself but superimposes all manner of overwrought accelerations that leave the impression that God's benediction in solitude must be a harrowing experience. 'Pensée des morts', Liszt's final word on ideas previously elaborated in the piano piece *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* and the so-called *De profundis* Concerto, both from 1834, fares somewhat better, despite cavalier disregard of the composer's pedal markings and dynamic indications. Refusal to take 'Funérailles' at face value, namely as an expression of the immense dignity surrounding national mourning, akin to *Héroïde funèbre* or Berlioz's *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*, transforms pathos into strident bathos.

Wagner is clearly more at home in the more intimate sound worlds of Pärt. Her

Liszt interpretations, on the other hand, seem filled with the very qualities that she says made his music so difficult to assimilate. **Patrick Rucker**

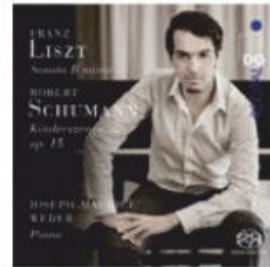
Liszt • Schumann

Liszt Piano Sonata, S178

Schumann Kinderszenen, Op 15

Joseph-Maurice Weder pf

Dabringhaus und Grimm (F) MDG904 2042-6 (55' • DDD/DSD)



First impressions: a Liszt Sonata running to 33'19" – a bit on the slow side.

Likewise *Kinderszenen* at 21'30". And as a coupling? Unusual. Relatively short disc time (54'51"). MDG, so the recorded sound is guaranteed to be demonstration class. Youngish Swiss pianist (b1988) described in the booklet as a 'sought-after soloist' whose 'international career got off to a successful start when he won the prestigious Swiss Ambassador's Award in London'.

So to the contents, played on a warm, mellow-toned 1901 Steinway Model D. Joseph-Maurice Weder's view of the Liszt Sonata, presented as a single track, unfolds magisterially in some detail, but while his recording is clearly a carefully prepared studio affair, there are some things to be gained from a more measured reading of this great score. The build-up to the first statement of the noble *grandioso* theme is powerfully realised; there is time at the close of the 'slow movement' for a true *ppp* in the few bars preceding the fugue which, if lacking in *energico*, is articulated with transparency and played *sempre piano* until the transition from B flat minor to C major as requested. You don't always get that. Nor the semiquaver rests Liszt inserts in the right hand a page or so later when the going has got a little tougher. On the other hand, Weder applies the handbrake rather too fiercely prior to those torrential *presto* octaves towards the end.

There is, too, much to admire in the Schumann, not least the intimate fireside atmosphere Weder produces with the help of his Steinway ('Am Kamin', for example, and 'Fast zu ernst'). There is a welcome simplicity and directness to his approach despite a somewhat over-extended 'Der Dichter spricht'. Nonetheless, whether the whole CD is a sought-after commercial proposition must remain a moot point. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Paderewski

Melody, Op 16 No 2. **Minuet**, Op 14 No 1.

Nocturne, Op 16 No 4. **Piano Sonata**, Op 21.

Toccata, 'Dans le désert', Op 15

Radosław Sobczak pf

Dux (F) DUX1503 (55' • DDD)

Szymanowski

Mazurkas, Op 50 - No 14; No 15. **Piano Sonata**

No 2, Op 21. **Nine Preludes**, Op 1

Radosław Sobczak pf

Dux (F) DUX1502 (59' • DDD)



These two anthologies of Szymanowski's and Paderewski's piano music arrived just in time for the centenary of Poland's independence, celebrated on the same day as the Armistice. Paderewski played a crucial part in securing his nation's inclusion as the 13th point of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points peace statement, and he went on to serve as Poland's Prime Minister for 10 months.

All the pieces in Sobczak's programme belong to the creative period just before these events. From the charming Chopinesque miniatures, including the popular Minuet in G, to the passionately rhetorical Sonata, Sobczak shows clear affinity with and affection for the music, and his account of the Sonata certainly surpasses Jonathan Plowright's in bringing vividness to its Lisztian bluster. But neither in this monumental opus nor in the smaller pieces is he a match for Kevin Kenner. Although the dry recording is not in Sobczak's favour, that challenge is really no more than Kenner's in getting the best from his mellow 1925 instrument (the composer's own) in an over-resonant acoustic. Where Kenner triumphs is in the subtlety, even wit, of his rubato, which allow the music to breathe and move forwards. Sobczak, by contrast, leaves it standing still or, worse, limping, with his rapidly predictable exaggeration of first beats.

Exaggeration and excess are certainly major ingredients of Szymanowski's musical language, and the question for interpreters is whether to exaggerate them further or to temper them. Martin Roscoe takes the latter approach, favouring intellectual control and long-line structure. Sobczak allows more spontaneity and spasmodic sensuality,

which certainly enliven the Chopin-meets-early-Scriabin Preludes; and the other miniatures on the disc also survive, even prosper. However, in the already hyper-contrapuntal and orchestral Second Sonata, the same strategy makes the music feel like a claustrophobic steam-room. The combination of technical strenuousness and dry recording makes for a sound that is generally on the thin side and notably harsh in louder episodes, giving us neither the fluidity and facility of Hamelin nor the drama and fury of Richter, who, despite playing to a background of coughs and sneezes, turns the sonata into a breathing and living organism. Sobczak's habitual stretching of phrases and rhythmic distortions work against him and the music, particularly in the opening theme of the second movement, where Richter brings out the Scriabinesque élan at the same time as preserving a degree of lilt, saving the music from drowning in its own sweat.

Michelle Assay

Paderewski Piano Sonata – selected comparisons:

Plowright (12/07) (HYPE) CDA67562

Kenner (10/18) (NIFC) NIFCCD057

Szymanowski Piano Works – selected comparison:

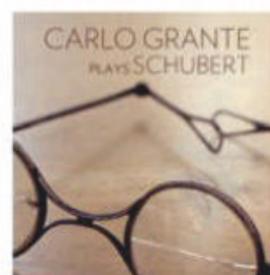
Roscoe (NAXO) 8 504045

Szymanowski Piano Sonata No 2 – selected comparison:

Richter (MELO) MELCD100 2270-48

Schubert

Allegretto, D915. Klavierstücke, D946. March, D606. Moments musicaux, D780. Ungarische Melodie, D817
Carlo Grante *p*f
 Music & Arts Ⓜ CD1292 (72' • DDD)



For this disc, recorded in Vienna in 2013, Carlo Grante chose a superbly maintained

1923 Bösendorfer Imperial, loaned by Eva and Paul Badura-Skoda. Though the choice of a piano, albeit a Viennese one, that post-dates the composer by almost a century might seem strange, its striking sonority stimulates closer listening.

Grante's *Moments musicaux* create an intimate atmosphere that avoids cloying preciousness. The first, in C major, is characterised by a warm lyricism of many layers and colours. No 2 in A flat major establishes an unrushed lilt that encloses contrasting sections of tender melancholy and, perhaps, an outburst of grief. The most famous of the set, the 'Hungarian' No 3 in F minor is refreshingly straightforward and unaffected. Grante's tempo for the C sharp minor is quicker than customary, creating an air of urgent intricacy. The brief fury of No 5 in

F minor resolves in the beguiling charm of the concluding A flat major, No 6.

If Grante's approach to the *Drei Klavierstücke* of May 1828 is more lyrical than dramatic, the pieces' individual characters, mercurial mood shifts and emotional urgency are vividly portrayed. In No 1 in E flat minor, he observes the cut in Schubert's manuscript, restored in Brahms's 1868 first edition and which is more often than not played today.

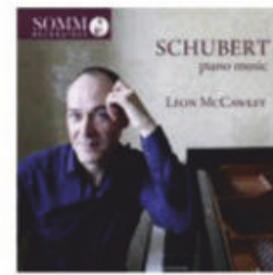
Of the smaller pieces, the *Hungarian Melody* has a characteristically piquant hauteur, while a strong but not overstated case is made for the little album leaf we know as the *Allegretto* in C minor. The cheerful E major March rounds out this thoughtful programme, which will surely delight connoisseurs and satisfy all lovers of Schubert. **Patrick Rucker**

Schubert

Fantasy, 'Wanderer', D760. Klavierstücke, D946. Five Songs (arr Liszt), S558

Leon McCawley *p*f

Somm Céleste Ⓜ SOMMCD0188 (68' • DDD)



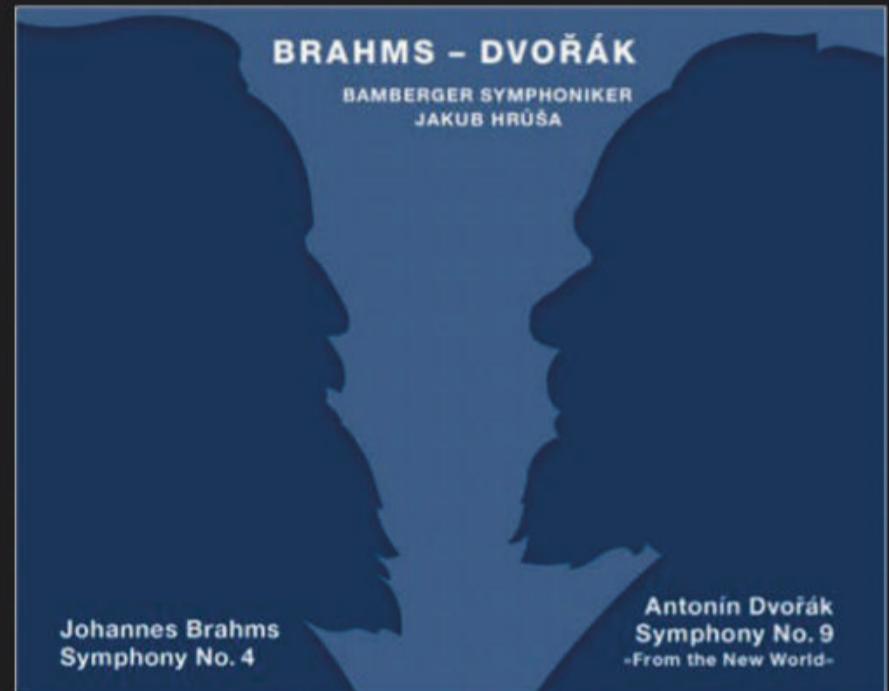
Listening to some of the more self-indulgent of Liszt's transcriptions of

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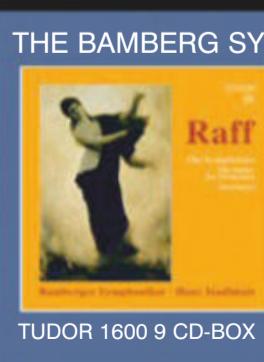


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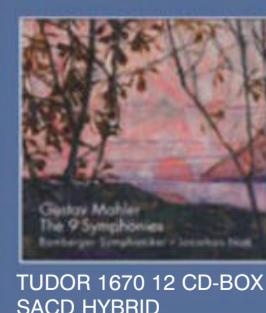
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DEBUSSY WITHOUT HAMMERS

Jed Distler welcomes two fine piano discs as we near the end of Harmonia Mundi's exceptional series marking Debussy's centenary



Roger Muraro plays Debussy and Messiaen with a mature mastery

Debussy

Préludes, Book 1. Estampes

Javier Perianes *p*

Harmonia Mundi HMM90 2301 (58' • DDD)

Debussy · Messiaen

Debussy Études

Messiaen Fauvettes de l'Hérault^a

Roger Muraro *p*

Harmonia Mundi HMM90 5304 (73' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at Studio 104, Paris,

February 2018



The warm and mellifluous sound enveloping **Javier Perianes**'s coupling of *Préludes* Book 1 and *Estampes* is much in keeping with the composer's 'piano without hammers' paradigm, as well as the pianist's penchant for sensitive nuances. Notice, for example, the refined dynamic gradations in 'Danseuses de Delphes', along with Perianes's expressively gratuitous ritards at phrase endings. If the billowy ambience of 'Voiles' seems to just hang there, the rapid ostinatos in 'Le vent dans la plaine' are bracingly even and controlled. No 4 is a tad sedate for my taste, and lacks the profile and rhythmic backbone heard from Paul Jacobs and Steven Osborne. And some listeners will

find Perianes's sombre deliberation in No 6 more convincing than I do.

Perianes unleashes No 7's turbulent waves of arpeggios with little help from the sustain pedal, while precisely scaling the dynamics and accents so as not to overbuild: an unorthodox approach, to be sure, yet ultimately convincing. No 8's flaxen-haired girl makes an understated impact, while No 9's repeated notes descend with supple lilt and lightness of being. While more intense and divergently balanced versions of 'La cathédrale engloutie' exist, Perianes's reading is shapely and impeccably paced. For all the control of 'La danse de Puck', Perianes underplays its harmonic surprises; but his slightly arch teasing of the melodic line brings out the quirky cakewalking character in 'Minstrels'.

In *Estampes*, Perianes generally goes for allure and suggestion, sometimes to the music's disadvantage. His soft-grained blending of left-hand chords against right-hand runs in the section of 'Pagodes' marked *sans lenteur* is opposed to Debussy's *dans une sonorité plus claire* request. By contrast, Sviatoslav Richter brings this passage's gamelan-inspired polyphony into far bolder relief. And compared to the lithe animation of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet in 'Jardins sous la pluie', Perianes runs on cruise control, so to speak. But his curvaceous 'La soirée dans Grenade' is right on target, and what impressive independence between the hands.

For the most part, **Roger Muraro**'s attention to detail puts a fresh spin on Debussy's *Études*. He takes No 1's introductory Czerny-scale pastiche briskly and brusquely, while characterising the main section's sudden rubato measures as abrupt interruptions. He keeps No 2's legato thirds resolutely yet flexibly *moderato*, while distinctions between sustained and detached articulation in No 3 have rarely been so well articulated. Also notice how Muraro reins in the repeated sixths in No 4's *poco agitato* sequences so that they don't get too loud too soon.

In the waltzing lilt of No 5, some may prefer a tighter leash on the basic pulse, but Muraro's full-bodied staccato playing grabs your ear. Despite Uchida's élan and surface sheen in No 6, Muraro's slower tempo gives Debussy's dynamic hairpins and articulation markings their due. Inspiration sags in No 7, leaving Uchida and Bavouzet to capture the étude's *scherzando* sparkle. Muraro's similarly low-key No 8, however, allows the composer's rich harmonies and resonant overtones to truly sink in, although his repeated notes in No 9 don't match his aforementioned colleagues' incisiveness. Muraro's mature mastery reveals itself throughout No 10, particularly in the sustained calm of the cross-handed chord sequence starting at bar 15 and the careful gauging of the *Sempre animando*'s climax. He builds No 11 from the bottom up, bringing bass lines and melodic up-beats to the fore. The pianist also takes the *diminuendo* and *staccato* markings of No 12's octave leaps seriously and uncovers hidden melodies few others notice.

The three-movement Messiaen work represents Muraro's 2017 solo piano reconstruction of what was originally planned as a concerto. A looming deadline compelled Messiaen to scale down the project and rework his ideas for what would become the *Sept Haïkai* for piano and small ensemble. Most of the material is based on birdsong that Messiaen notated during a 1958 visit to the Hérault region of southern France. Not surprisingly, the music's florid asymmetry, rapid chordal flights and rapid-fire contrasts between lyrical repose and fiery virtuosity relate to the sound world and time-scale presented in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Muraro's assured and fervent immersion in Messiaen's idiom is not a surprise, given his long and distinctive history with the composer's keyboard output in concert and on disc.

In sum, both CDs offer much stimulating listening, reservations notwithstanding.

Schubert's most profound songs on this disc, I cannot help thinking of the scene in Ken Russell's sublimely silly 1975 biopic, *Lisztomania*. There Liszt performs his variations on a theme from *Rienzi*, including in them the 'Chopsticks' melody and leaving Wagner hiding his face in shame. Performing one or two of these transcriptions as encores is a crowd-pleasing way of ending a concert, and Leon McCawley is an eloquent advocate. But including five of them at the heart of a programme entitled 'Schubert's Piano Music' surely needs some justification. Certainly it makes sense to place Liszt's transcription of the 'Wanderer' song alongside the *Wanderer Fantasy*, which has Schubert's own variations on the song's theme at the heart of it; still, the main impression it leaves is that not all that glitters is gold.

What could certainly benefit from more luminosity is Leon McCawley's tone. Though effective and intellectual and technically adept, there is a certain blandness to his playing that suggests more a pre-performance sketch than a compelling live account. It is enough to compare McCawley's intermittently choppy *Wanderer* to Richter, in particular his 1963 Salle Wagram recording, with its hypnotic and heart-stopping *Adagio*, where it is almost possible to hear the unsung words of the Lied, and the apocalyptic whirlpools of the finale.

Schubert's gift for evoking words even when there is no voice present shines through the *Drei Klavierstücke*, placed first on the disc. There is much to admire in McCawley's attention to detail. But he falls far short of the kind of drama and poetry that inform Mitsuko Uchida's accounts, not least in the chorale section of No 3, where her apparent transcending of the limitations of the piano seems somehow symbolic of Schubert's transcendence of this world.

Michelle Assay

Wanderer Fantasy – selected comparison:

Richter (EMI) 623080-2

Drei Klavierstücke – selected comparison:

Uchida (8/98^R) (PHIL) 475 6282PB8

'Belle Époque'

Aubert Suite brève, Op 6

Chaminade Valse carnavalesque, Op 73

Debussy En blanc et noir

Hahn Le ruban dénoué

Koechlin Suite, Op 6

Ludmila Berlinskaya, Arthur Ancelle pfs

Melodiya Ⓜ MELCD100 2563 (73' • DDD)



In the March 2017 issue it was a pleasure to give a warm welcome to a recital from this husband-and-wife duo featuring the first recording of Saint-Saëns's arrangement for two pianos of Liszt's mighty B minor Sonata. They follow this with a second highly engaging and resourceful two-piano programme.

Cécile Chaminade's boisterous *Valse carnavalesque* sets the scene. Why don't more two-piano teams feature this and the two short suites of movements that succeed it? The first is a genial early work by Charles Koechlin (1867–1950, pupil of Massenet and Fauré, teacher of Poulenc), the second the premiere recording of a piece by Louis Aubert, a fine pianist in his day (1877–1968), the dedicatee of Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, whose 1900 *Suite brève* is characterised by the booklet writer as 'involuntary anticipation of Ravel's neoclassic piano opuses'.

Then comes Reynaldo Hahn's suite of 12 (mainly brief) waltzes with the charming title of *Le ruban dénoué* ('The unravelled ribbon'). Those familiar with Hahn's songs and chamber music will know what to expect. Despite the fact that the music was written in 1915, there is nothing of the First World War, Schoenberg or Stravinsky ('I am not crediting them with greater musical value than they have', wrote Hahn) but the bitter-sweet melancholy of Hahn's undemanding melodies acknowledges that *La belle époque* was over. Other composers make fleeting appearances (Godowsky, for one, and even Sullivan in 'Il sorriso').

Debussy's *En blanc et noir* (also from 1915) completes the recital. Here the war is referred to both obliquely and directly in all three movements, given a bold and characterful outing by the Russian duo, their tempos consistently faster than the wonderful Tal and Groethuysen on their disc entitled '1915' (Sony Classical) as they also nearly always are in *Le ruban dénoué*. But there really is little to choose between the two duos as far as the balance between the pianos, their voicing and the recorded sound are concerned.

Jeremy Nicholas

'Variations sérieuses'

JS Bach/Busoni Chaconne **Beethoven**

Variations on an Original Theme, WoO80

Bizet Variations chromatiques de concert

Mendelssohn Variations sérieuses, Op 54

Szymanowski Variations, Op 3

Lilit Grigoryan pfs

Orchid Ⓜ ORC100088 (73' • DDD)



The Armenian pianist Lilit Grigoryan's 2012 solo release containing sonatas by Scarlatti, Schumann and Bartók essentially revealed a highly capable yet rather inhibited artist at work. This impression spills over into her all-variations

programme's opening selections. The pianist's textually scrupulous and cleanly executed Bach/Busoni Chaconne flattens out the music's enormous peaks and valleys, only exuding tension and poetry in the final pages. Nothing goes wrong in Beethoven's C minor Variations, yet where is the aching expression underneath No 9's sextuplet trills, the ferocity in No 18's upward scales or the intensity of the double notes in Nos 26 and 27? In the Ivan Moravec (Supraphon) and Mitsuko Uchida (Philips) recordings, but not here.

Grigoryan plays the faster sections of Mendelssohn's *Variations sérieuses* with appreciable brilliance and élan, but don't expect Murray Perahia's astute voice-leading (Sony) nor Alicia de Larrocha's pinpoint differentiation of textures (Decca). However, Grigoryan includes four rejected variations as an appendix. Once you hear them, you understand why Mendelssohn scrapped them! While pianists generally haven't shown interest in Bizet's *Variations chromatiques* since Glenn Gould made the first recording back in 1971 (Sony), Grigoryan positively revels in the work's fanciful harmonic detours and theatrical touches. Indeed, her tremolos in Var 5 conjure Bizet's mysterious intentions more effectively than Gould's.

Finally, her sonority and expressive potential noticeably open up for Szymanowski's Op 3 Variations, and if Martin Jones (Nimbus) wields a lighter hand in the *agitato* Vars 2 and 7 and the mazurka of Var 3, Grigoryan's more subjective inflections prove equally plausible, not to mention her singing line in Var 10's *Andantino dolce*. Recommended mostly for the Bizet and Szymanowski. **Jed Distler**

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Anna Thorvaldsdóttir

With her music's humbling vastness and depth of colour, this Icelander is a force to be reckoned with, says Andrew Mellor

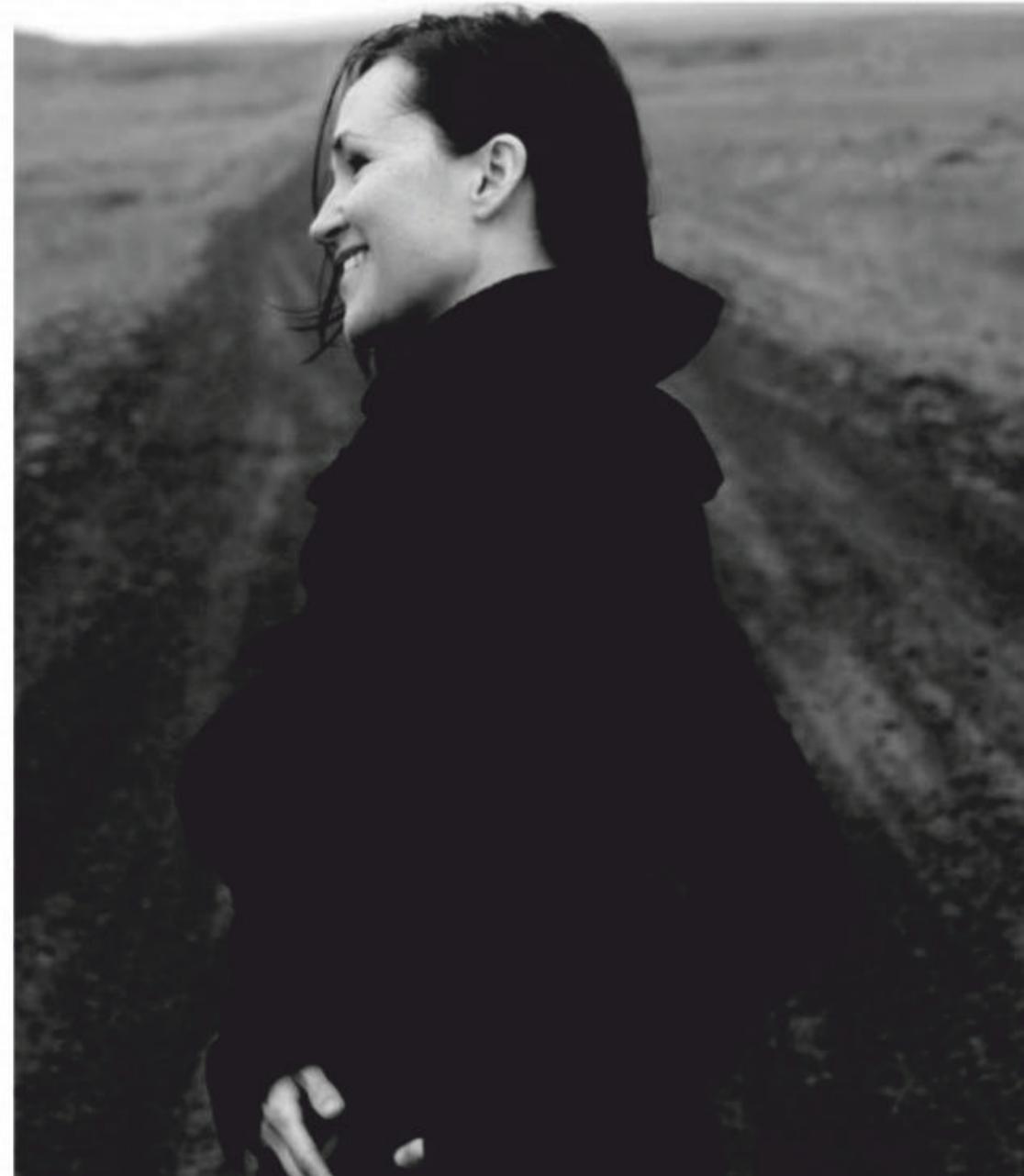
Before notating her works conventionally via the five lines of the musical stave, Anna Thorvaldsdóttir literally draws them. The pristine pencil illustrations this process spawns are something to behold. One of them is reproduced on the cover – and inside the booklet, in a more complete version – of what was the first album to feature her music and her music alone: *Rhízōma*.

The drawing features a consistent yet bumpy horizon of two almost-horizontal lines in counterpoint. Beneath that, multiple roots gather towards a single, thick trunk before breaking into four branches, fraying outwards at their end points (it could be a forbidding volcano; it could be a weedy turnip). Thoughts in text form are scattered around in meticulous block capitals: 'In constant development' / 'Bell like' / 'I predict that the duration of this piece will be approximately 12-14 minutes'.

The moaning glissandos appear to tip the entire ensemble from high to low, as if from winter darkness to summer light

Speaking at an open question-and-answer session in Copenhagen in January, Thorvaldsdóttir explained that she uses drawings like these as compositional aids, devices for 'mapping where a piece is going'. But they contain vital structural clues for the rest of us. In the case of this particular drawing – an image of the piece *Streaming Arhythmia* (2007) – we can trace how the biology of subterranean roots or 'rhizomes' has influenced the development of the music. The sketch also bears an uncanny resemblance to the landscape of Thorvaldsdóttir's Iceland: a barren and highly atmospheric terrain characterised by black rock, dark moss, starkly outlined volcanic peaks and a total lack of trees.

It is easy and absorbing to latch on to such picture-book images while listening to Thorvaldsdóttir's music. But nature influences her scores as much in a technical sense as in an aesthetic one. 'You get structural hints from nature about how to work with your material,' she said in Copenhagen. The root or rhizome imagery can help illuminate that. First, her works are strewn with instances of sudden blossoming born of recently coalesced material. Secondly, her larger pieces tend to reflect the same process on a broader level: material coming into focus now and then but controlling process and form all the while, beneath the surface. Like the music of some other Nordic composers who have worked to the same principle, Thorvaldsdóttir's



is strong enough to be disassociated from those references while retaining its fascination, power and charm.

The composer frequently returns to natural imagery. She was raised in Bogarnes, a small town on Iceland's south-west coast, 'surrounded by mountains and ocean'. She subsequently lived in California and New York, but admits that 'when you move away, you realise that these original places and spaces are always a part of you'. Now she resides in London. But her music shows no signs of shedding its humbling vastness nor its depth of colour, which tells of many shades of darkness ('nature tells you that brown is never just brown').

That feeling of expanse is often connected to Thorvaldsdóttir's confident and distinctive handling of the orchestra. Her first work for large orchestra, *Dreaming* (2008), is an imposing monolith that emerges from silence and recedes back into it, speaking of natural desolation, severe beauty and precarious tectonics in between. It won the Nordic Council Music Prize in 2012. Soon after that came *Aeriality* (2011), which took Thorvaldsdóttir's work even closer to the intersection of symphonic music and sound art, building on certain principles born in *Dreaming* (notably, that instrumental autonomy can contribute to the creation of a larger, apparently single woven texture).

Aeriality is a broad tapestry in which each instrument does its own thing on its own terms, contributing to the swirling stasis of the bigger picture. But in this piece we also hear Thorvaldsdóttir expanding her language in the direction of quarter-tones and noise music while pushing the idea of a single monolith to breaking point as her characteristic pedal notes creak under the weight of the machinery they support. Thus, even more than *Dreaming*, *Aeriality* suggests the faltering and



THORVALDSDÓTTIR FACTS

Born on July 11, 1977, in Bogarnes, Iceland
Studied composition at the University of California, San Diego
Awarded the Nordic Council Music Prize in 2012, for her orchestral work *Dreaming*; has received Icelandic Music Awards in 2011, 2012 and 2015

Composer-in-residence with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra from January 2018; formerly a Kravis Emerging Composer at the New York Philharmonic from 2015, culminating in the orchestral work *Metacosmos*

Key quote: 'When you see a long sustained pitch, think of it as a fragile flower that you need to carry in your hands and walk the distance on a thin rope without dropping it or falling. It is a way of measuring time and noticing the tiny changes that happen as you walk further along the same thin rope. Absolute tranquility with the necessary amount of concentration needed to perform the task' (performance note printed in score for *Ró*)

grinding of tectonic plates, as well as other natural phenomena – from terrifying earthbound eruptions to the strange luminosity of the far north's changeable skies.

There is more large-scale orchestral Thorvaldsdóttir on the way. At the beginning of this year, the composer took up a residency at the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, the ensemble responsible for the birthing of *Dreaming*. 'Working with orchestras is not something that comes out of nowhere,' she said at a preconcert interview in London prior to a performance of *Aeriality* by the Philharmonia Orchestra under Esa-Pekka Salonen in September 2017; 'You need someone from an orchestra to pay attention to you.' Someone at the New York Philharmonic has been doing just that. She became a Kravis Emerging Composer with the ensemble in 2015, when its then music director Alan Gilbert described her as 'one of the most unique and expressive voices in the compositional scene'. In April of this year, the orchestra – with Salonen – gave the first performance of the work it commissioned as a result of that fellowship: *Metacosmos* (2017).

It is interesting to encounter Thorvaldsdóttir's smaller works having been immersed in some of her larger ones. While the processes and journeys are often the same, in these works they are laid bare – they're more discernable to the listener, but at the same time they present different opportunities for the composer.

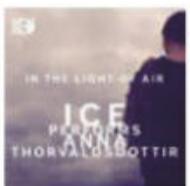
Hrim, for an ensemble of 14 players, is a good example. It was written in 2009-10 for the New Music Ensemble at the University of California, San Diego, as a partner piece for Ligeti's Chamber Concerto (1969-70). Similar to the Ligeti, *Hrim*'s development is taut, tense and focused (the

Icelandic title refers to the slow growth of ice crystals). It also clearly introduces some of Thorvaldsdóttir's regular processes while revealing more about her seductive ear for instrumental colour. The piece is controlled by impulses that ease the discourse towards apparently small but highly percussive structural events, each matching the 'refined severity of gesture' described by Peter Quantrill in relation to *Ad genua* (2016) for choir and ensemble (12/17). There are flickers of tuneful lyricism in *Hrim*, as when the violin reaches for a little tune with which to lure the cello into an embrace; but however much these might stand out, we feel more strongly the power of the whole – and the stern stuff with which the composer explores colour using instruments of similar register, and reflects on the idea of light.

Just as often as she uses timbre, Thorvaldsdóttir will use quarter-tones as a colouring effect, as a means of shading her textures. That is apparent in one of her most recent works, *Spectra* (2017), which reimagines that broad tapestry of miniature gestures but in the context of a relatively minuscule string trio. Quarter-tones, as well as the moaning glissandos with which they are often accessed, are a mainstay of *Hrim*, too. The quarter-tones do much of the colouristic work, while the glissandos appear to tip the entire ensemble from high to low, as if from total winter darkness to piercing summer light. Throughout the piece it feels as though the ear, rather than the brain, is in control. That tells you how well the piece works with Ligeti's Chamber Concerto, but also why Thorvaldsdóttir is a composer from whom we will be hearing a lot more. **G**

THORVALDSDÓTTIR ON DISC

Revel in the music's combination of power and intimacy



'In the Light of Air'

International Contemporary Ensemble
 Sono Luminus

The central work on this recording from ICE is that from which it takes its title. *In the Light of Air* (2014) for ensemble and electronics is an exquisite tetralogy that forms a single statement, in which melodies are thrown up by the music's very exploration of sound and texture. It's a musical perusal of light and air, and of visibility, temperature and geology.



'Aerial'

Caput Ens; Nordic Affect; Iceland SO / Ilan Volkov et al
 DG

The centrepiece of DG's portrait album is Thorvaldsdóttir's current signature orchestral work, *Aeriality* (2011). But across all six pieces here we get varied pictures of the composer's combination of power and intimacy. The extraordinarily focused ensemble work *Ró* (2013) offers a microscopic view of the composer's processes, and *Shades of Silence* (2012) for a quartet of baroque instruments is a genuine delicacy.



'Rhizoma'

Justin DeHart perc Caput Ens / Snorri Sigfús Birgisson;
 Iceland SO / Daniél Bjarnason
 Innova

This is another disc that pivots on a large orchestral canvass, in this case *Dreaming* (2008). But Thorvaldsdóttir's debut album also contains its chamber orchestra predecessor *Streaming Arhythmia* (2007) and also *Hrim* (2009-10), which is itself echoed in the four separated movements of *Hidden* (2009) – a piercing essay for piano and percussion.

Vocal



Pwyll ap Siôn hears 'A Countertenor Songbook' from Andrew Watts:

'Dense textures explore an unsettling world, the piano's competing lines like voices trapped inside a disturbed mind' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



Edward Breen on a celebration of the Eton Choirbook's legacy:

'The Sixteen excel in each and every choral texture MacMillan uses in this sumptuous, statuesque work' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 82**

Beethoven · Hummel · Stravinsky



Beethoven Mass in C major, Op 86^a

Hummel Trumpet Concerto^b

Stravinsky Symphony in Three Movements

^aGenia Kühmeier sop ^aGerhild Romberger mez

^aMaximilian Schmitt ten ^aLuca Pisaroni bass-bar

^bMartin Angerer tpt **Bavarian Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra / Mariss Jansons**

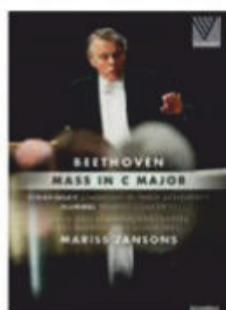
Video director **Elisabeth Malzer**

Belvedere (F) BVE08041; (F) BVE08042

(91' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0,

DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich, January 2018



Unlike several of the Mass settings Haydn made late in life for Prince Esterházy, Beethoven did not subtitle his C major Mass 'in tempore belli' – in time of war – when fulfilling the same commission in 1807. Yet he could have done so – Beethoven was writing it at the height of the Fourth Napoleonic War, and with at least one of Haydn's Masses to hand for reference – and Mariss Jansons conducts the kind of emphatic and grandly scaled performance that, in looking forward to the *Missa solemnis* more than back to Haydn, implies that he should have done.

Having reduced the forces of his Bavarian orchestra for the Trumpet Concerto of Hummel – who fulfilled commissions for Esterházy with rather greater success than Beethoven – Jansons elects to fill the stage again; perhaps to match the Bavarian Radio Chorus at full strength, or to complement the opening Stravinsky item on a programme designated as his 75th birthday concert, which really is a symphony composed in time of war. Instrumental colours are bright, exact and assertive. Were there a slider for musical rather than picture contrast, it would be set at maximum.

Yet a besetting impassiveness pervades not only Martin Angerer's impeccably fluid

and assured account of the Hummel.

Among a mellifluously blended team of vocal soloists in the Mass, only Gerhild Romberger offers something extra, something urgent and personal in her entreaty of 'Qui tollis peccata mundi'. At a conservative tempo, the Symphony's opening themes switch between glaring brutality and febrile anxiety, but the 'swung' third theme falls flat, and the development section is becalmed in sequential repetition (diminishing returns likewise afflict the closing fugues of Beethoven's *Gloria* and *Credo*). A balletic but oddly flippant approach to Stravinsky's slow movement underplays its pathos, and the jazz-hands conclusion of the finale is more refined than raucous.

Beethoven insisted that the keynotes of his Mass were cheerfulness and gentleness, and these qualities are evident in a tenderly shaped *Sanctus* and *Benedictus*. On film, this performance has the field to itself – unless you have access to the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall, where Nikolaus Harnoncourt (in his last appearance with the orchestra) employs similarly scaled and polished forces to markedly more stirring effect.

Peter Quantrill

JF Brown

Clarinet Concerto, 'Lost Lanes - Shadow Groves'^a, *The Heavens and the Heart*^b.

Trio concertante^c

^aCartriona Scott cl/c Benjamin Nabarro vn/c Rachel

Roberts va/c Gemma Rosefield vc/b The Choir of Royal Holloway; Orchestra Nova / George Vass

Resonus (F) RES10227 (64' • DDD • T/t)



The music of James Francis Brown (b1969) is one of Britain's well-kept secrets. Too well kept for my liking. This new release from Resonus is the first of any of his orchestral works, and what a disc it is! The *Trio concertante* (2005-06) is a glorious single-movement triple concerto for violin, viola

and cello that belongs in the topmost rank of British string-orchestral music. The musical style may be rooted in Vaughan Williams, early Tippett and Britten, yet on closer acquaintance one realises that Brown's music is truly all his own. A glorious listen, no wonder George Vass chose to perform it in his 60th birthday concert at St John's Smith Square last year, which is where I first encountered it.

The Clarinet Concerto *Lost Lanes - Shadow Groves* (2008) is no less evocative, partly of the rural landscape of Norfolk but also as an exploration of the pathways of the mind, of the resonances and historical associations the real landscape calls forth. Admirers of Rubbra's choral music will, I think, find much to enjoy in the three psalms comprising *The Heavens and the Heart* (2015-16). Orchestra Nova's performances are thoroughly committed and winning, proving themselves real partners to the four excellent soloists and splendid Royal Holloway Choir, all playing with a relish matched on the podium by Vass. The sound is terrific, too. A must-buy disc! **Guy Rickards**

Caldara

'Brutus: Cantatas for Bass'

A destar l'alba col canto. Bruto a' Romani.

Il Dario. Partenza amorosa. Il Polifemo.

Il Sansone

Sergio Foresti bass **Stile Galante / Stefano Aresi**

Pan Classics (F) PC10389 (66' • DDD • T/t)



These six cantatas for bass voice with only basso continuo accompaniment are in a manuscript preserved in Bologna but perhaps date from Caldara's last 20 years in Vienna. *Bruto a' Romani* is a political speech by Lucius Junius Brutus (the founder of the Roman Republic) rallying the people to overthrow the tyrannical king Lucius Tarquinus Superbus, whose son has raped the noblewoman Lucretia. According to Livy, Brutus made this speech immediately



Rhetorical sensibility: the bass Sergio Foresti sings cantatas by Antonio Caldara, spanning the biblical and the pastoral

after Lucretia had committed suicide. Sergio Foresti declaims the poetry with marvellous clarity and rhetorical sensibility, and he sings the wide-leaping part with technical finesse; there is a compelling juxtaposition of open-throated roar and articulate intimacy in an invocation to Astraea (goddess of justice) that seems as much an elegy for Lucretia as it is a call to overthrow the decadent monarchy.

Il Polifemo takes its cue from Homer's tale of the tormented Polyphemus's impotent fury upon being outwitted and blinded by Ulysses – cursing all and sundry, he hurls himself into the sea. *Il Dario* (c1727) is the Persian king Darius, defeated by Alexander the Great, and who believes his beloved wife is lost to him forever. An extraordinary central recitative imploring the gods to end his life is flanked by portraits of weeping in which pathos-laden contrapuntal details are beautifully sung and played. *Il Sansone* is a dramatisation of the Old Testament story in which the hero bewails his blindness, feels his strength returning and brings the temple of Dagon down upon the Philistines.

At the other end of the spectrum are two cantatas on conventionally pastoral subjects: *A destar l'alba col canto* is a

melancholy poem arguing that cheerful birdsong at dawn masks being robbed of peace by a fickle lover (a *topos* straight from Petrarch), whereas *Partenza amorosa* is Lidio's seductive music of farewell to his Arcadian lover Amaryllis; its centrepiece 'Onde, voi che mormorate' proves both the lyrical qualities of the composer and the skills of his interpreters, with emotionally aware accompaniments played with expressive variety and sensitivity by cellist Agnieszka Oszanca, theorist Gabriele Palomba and harpsichordist Andrea Friggi.

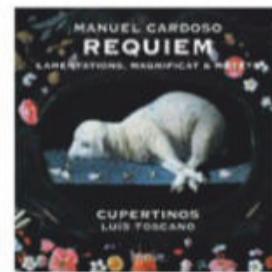
David Vickers

Cardoso

Missa pro defunctis a 4. Amen dico vobis.
Cum audisset Johannes. Domine, tu mihi lavas
pedes?. Ipse est qui post me. Lamentations for
Maundy Thursday. Magnificat secundi toni a 4.
Omnis vallis. Quid hic statis?. Sitivit anima mea.
Tua est potentia

Cupertinos / Luís Toscana

Hyperion © CDA68252 (70' • DDD • T/t)



It's more than 20 years since a clutch of recordings put Cardoso on the map,

including one of his six-voice Requiem by The Tallis Scholars (Gimell, 10/90), a Mass and motet recital by The Sixteen (Coro, 8/94), and another from Philippe Herreweghe's Ensemble Vocal Européen (Harmonia Mundi, 5/97). Though not as opulent as its more richly scored companion, his four-voice Requiem is a compelling work, especially when sung with this degree of commitment. It's a quality that shines throughout the recording. The selection of motets is very satisfying: Cardoso is as adept in plainchant-based works as in freely composed ones. The well-known *Sitivit anima mea* is as compelling as ever. That said, a couple more extrovert pieces might have helped showcase this ensemble's skills more fully.

This is the first recording by Cupertinos for Hyperion and it is a pleasure to have a Portuguese ensemble tackle its native repertory. The sound is bright and privileges the higher voices, the lower ones being light baritones rather than basses. The timbre of the female altos, especially in their lower register, isn't quite familiar from other continental ensembles or English ones. This could do with a touch more polish, though one wouldn't want to lose the slightly acidulated quality, for it

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Monteverdi
Il ritorno d'Ulisse
in patria
Gardiner

Monteverdi's great opera is a celebration of unwavering devotion, conveyed in some of the composer's most poignant, heartbreaking music.

Sir John Eliot Gardiner leads an exemplary cast of world-class singers alongside the Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists in this live recording from The National Forum of Music in Wroclaw, Poland – part of their critically acclaimed Monteverdi 450 tour in 2017.



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The Choir of Royal Holloway and Orchestra Nova, conducted by George Vass, recording music by James Francis Brown - see review on page 70

adds something distinctive to the mix. Cardoso's penchant for chromatic touches is well known, but those false relations require gimlet-like precision, which isn't always the case here. But I look forward to hearing more from them soon: Cardoso's music deserves further exposure. **Fabrice Fitch**

Conti

Missa Sancti Pauli. Fastos caeli audite.

Pie Jesu ad te refugio. Sonata

Adriána Kalafszky sop Péter Bárány counterten

Zoltán Megyesi ten Thomas Dolié, Lóránt

Najbauer basses Purcell Choir; Orfeo Orchestra /

György Vashegyi

Glossa **CD GCD924004 (67' • DDD • T/t)**



The Florentine theorist Francesco Bartolomeo Conti (1681/82-1732) worked for over 30 years at the Habsburg court in Vienna. The enterprising György Vashegyi and his Budapest-based forces tackle the *Missa Sancti Pauli* preserved in the library of Vienna's Schottenstift Benedictine monastery (dated March 1715 but performed from time to time up until 1857). The Orfeo Orchestra's taut strings

are led expertly by violinist Simon Standage and there is judicious continuo-playing from theorist István Györe and organist Augustin Szokos. The concise contributions of soloists are interwoven deftly with the Purcell Choir's polished yet warmly sonorous singing of rich counterpoint; the excellent diction (standard Italian Latin rather than German pronunciation) and the contrapuntal details are balanced and projected with impeccable transparency. Astonishing chromaticism emphasising the reference to mercy in 'Qui tollis peccata mundi' was tailor-made for the learned tastes of the Habsburgs. The dramatic nature of Conti's writing is highlighted by the sudden change of key and unsettled harmonic modulations in 'Crucifixus' followed by the restoration of lucid extroversion for 'Et resurrexit'.

The Schottenstift manuscript also has a sincere Sonata in B flat and turbulent motet *Fastos caeli audite* inserted between the *Gloria* and the *Credo*; they are included in this recording *in situ*, the virtuoso motet sung by Péter Bárány with intelligence albeit frailty. As an afterpiece, the stand-alone aria *Pie Jesu, ad te refugio* (packed with extraordinary dissonances) is sung eloquently by Zoltán Megyesi. I wonder if it was written for Francesco Borosini:

the tenor who starred in Handel's *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda* was employed at the Vienna court chapel from 1712 to 1731. **David Vickers**

Dessy

Requiem^a. Semper gaudete^b. Isaïe^b

Jean-Paul Dessy VC

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir;

Tallinn Chamber Orchestra / Risto Joost

Cypres **CD CYP4652 (47' • DDD • T/t)**



Though I was familiar with the name of Jean-Paul Dessy as a conductor and cellist, this is the first time I have heard his music. *Requiem* sets a series of texts taken from a number of different religious traditions, all of them dealing in some way with the end of earthly life. There is a brief introductory text by the composer giving his own interpretation of what a requiem might be (though his idea that metanoia means to 'go beyond thought' is stretching things), but the journey the work makes seems to be essentially towards Christianity – we begin with words from the Bhagavad Gita, move

on to the Islamic affirmation that God is one, and then comes the Hebrew Kaddish. There follow the Lord's Prayer in Aramaic, words from the Gospel of St John and the Greek Orthodox paschal troparion, and the work finishes with the words of the Latin Requiem Mass.

The music is hard to describe; it tries hard to correspond to the sound of each language, perhaps the most unexpected thing being the initial abrasiveness of the Kaddish which is followed by some string-writing that reminds me of no one so much as Philip Glass. The Aramaic and Greek movements (the latter in desperate need of a pronunciation coach) also have something of the monumentality of the Glass of *Akhnaten*, while the final Requiem is austere static, and the most sheerly beautiful movement of the work. Performances are everything one would expect from the Estonians, under the secure direction of Risto Joost.

The disc is rounded off by two pieces for solo cello, played by the composer himself. These are highly idiomatic works, exploring spiritual themes in music that is at once challenging and beautiful, virtuosic and ecstatic. **Ivan Moody**

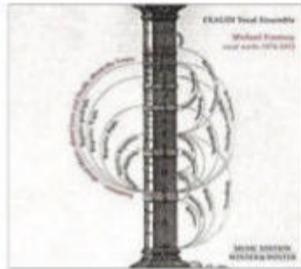
Finnissy

Cipriano. Gesualdo: Libro sesto.

Kelir. Tom Fool's Wooing

Exaudi Vocal Ensemble / James Weeks

Winter & Winter F 910 246-2 (70' • DDD)



This is one of those recordings where composer and performers seem uniquely matched. One senses a degree of commitment that is rare even from an ensemble that isn't known for pulling its punches. The four pieces recorded here span five decades, the earliest of which, *Cipriano*, is a 'dramatic madrigal' whose soloist endures (and delivers) extraordinary pyrotechnics against a scarcely less truculent ensemble, and the latest a cycle (2012-14) inspired by Gesualdo's Sixth Book of Madrigals. It's surprising in retrospect that Finnissy hadn't previously sharpened his wits and his pen against the notorious Italian, given their shared interest in transgressions of various sorts. It is perhaps the most approachable work of the recital and in some ways also the most subtle.

My own favourite is the starkly serious yet sensual fifth madrigal, for which Exaudi divide into two choirs that exchange smudged, overlapping chords. The trite

phrase 'well heard' is often an unintentional backhanded compliment, but here I use it admiringly: the interplay of these sonorities really is extraordinary. That the essential character of all seven pieces can be recalled after just one hearing testifies to their impact and cogency. The cycle also shows that Exaudi's virtuosity doesn't just hit you between the eyes; it runs deep.

The two middle works are more in keeping with what one might call Finnissy's grand style, and here Exaudi do let rip. In *Tom Fool's Wooing* (1975, rev 2015), clear narrative elements are just as clearly obscured, and a central *parlando*, self-consciously theatrical section in English is framed by more abstract episodes. Abstraction takes over almost entirely in the concluding *Kelir*, which dates from the time of Finnissy's Second Quartet and shares with it a comparable, almost classical ambition (or as close to a sort of classical modernism as Finnissy gets). Exaudi's wonderful sopranos are showcased throughout the recital, but at the very end it's the bassi profundi who have the last word. Superb. **Fabrice Fitch**

Holloway

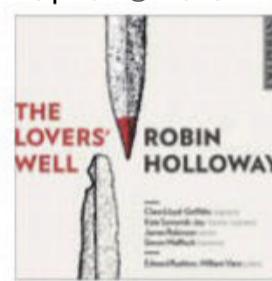
The Food of Love^a. The Lovers' Well^b. A Medley of Nursery Rhymes and Conundrums^c. Three Songs to Poems by Edmund Waller^c. Souvenirs de Monsalvat^d. The Zodiac Song^a

^aClare Lloyd-Griffiths sop ^{ac}Kate Symonds-Joy mez

^aJames Robinson ten ^{ab}Simon Wallfisch bar

^{bcd}Edward Rushton, ^{ad}William Vann pf

Delphian F DCD34216 (75' • DDD • T)



Song forms (or, more generally, vocal music) do not play such an important role in

Robin Holloway's creative output as for, say, Schubert or Wolf. Nevertheless, much of his music is informed or influenced in some way by 'texts' of various kinds, be they in the form of overt allusions to pre-existing vocal works, secret programmes and subtexts percolating underneath the surface, or echoes – distant or near – of other composers' 'voices'.

Marking Holloway's 75th birthday, this album traces his preoccupation with music and text, both explicitly in the form of song-settings and cycles and implicitly in a work that treats music as text. The latter is reflected in *Souvenirs de Monsalvat* – a substantial eight-movement suite for piano duet which recomposes material from Wagner's *Parsifal* in a manner evoking French Wagner send-ups of the late 19th century. Such a musical homage

about other musical homages may not be to everyone's taste but *Souvenirs de Monsalvat* manages to imbue Wagner's original material with wit, colour, youth and candour.

Holloway's ability to reconcile opposites of various kinds often sees him exploring that murky middle ground between tonality and atonality. 'The Zodiac Song' – John Ruskin's characterful inventory in rhyming couplets – provides Holloway with the means by which to shift effortlessly between styles through word- and sound-association, allusion and symbolisation. His setting of Shelley's 'The Food of Love' also fuses consonance and dissonance within a tensile, unsettling tonal idiom that eventually rests on a glowing E major triad.

However, the standout work on this recording is the song-cycle *The Lovers' Well*. With baritone Simon Wallfisch providing colourful and effective characterisation and Edward Rushton providing excellent support, Holloway manages to impart a strong sense of dramatic and thematic integration despite the selective nature of the setting (selections from Geoffrey Hill's 'The Pentecost Castle'). Here is a music that, despite its multifarious origins, is always, in Geraint Lewis's words, 'masterly in realisation'. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Lalande

'Grands Motets'

De profundis, S23. Dominus regnabit, S65.

Venite, exultemus Domino, S58

Chantal Santon-Jeffery sop Reinoud Van

Mechelen haute-contre François Joron ten

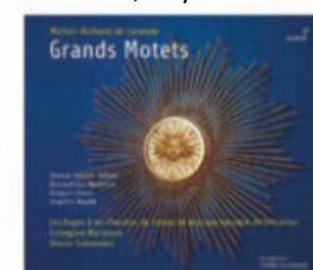
Lisandro Abadie bass Les Pages et les Chantres

du Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles;

Collegium Marianum / Olivier Schneebeli

Glossa F GCD924301 (79' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Chapelle Royale, Château de Versailles, July 2017



These three motets were composed for the Chapelle Royale at Versailles: not the present building, but its predecessor. Though the booklet-note rather stretches the point in claiming that they were conceived for today's chapel, where this recording was made, the acoustic properties are probably much the same: certainly the conductor, Olivier Schneebeli, makes full use of pause and resonance.

Lalande was given to revising his *grands motets* after the death of Louis XIV but here we have the original versions. The earliest piece, *De profundis*, dates



Extraordinary interplay of sonorities: the Exaudi Vocal Ensemble and their director James Weeks revel in the virtuosity of works by Michael Finnissy

from 1689. The mood is, naturally, predominantly sombre; but there's a charming passage in the 'Requiem aeternam' near the end, where a major-key, triple-time section suggests that Lalande is in no doubt that the dead will be rewarded with 'lux perpetua'. The choir's joyous crescendos over tied notes reinforce the point.

Whereas in *De profundis* verse often succeeds verse without a break, the other two motets are divided into sections. In *Venite, exultemus Domino*, from 1701, Lalande again confounds expectation. Amid the jubilation there's a bass solo and chorus, 'Venite, adoremus', where a slow tempo and Neapolitan sixth chords convey a sense of awe. 'Quoniam Deus' is similarly inward-looking, before the choir breaks in with cheerful counterpoint around a cantus firmus. Another number for bass, 'Quoniam non repellit Dominus', is enhanced by oboe and bassoon, while two flutes introduce the weeping curiously absent from the standard English translations.

Dominus regnavit, composed in 1704, is in similar mould, with a pleasing variety of mood and texture. Perhaps Schneebelli overdoes the staccato in 'Illuxerunt fulgura ejus', but his French choir of children and

adults can't be faulted, and the recorded balance is excellent. The woodwind solos and the rich, Lullian string textures are beautifully handled by Collegium Marianum, an ensemble from the Czech Republic. A little more weight from Lisandro Abadie would have been welcome, but all four soloists sing with a passion by no means alien to Lalande's operatic style. This is a most distinguished issue. **Richard Lawrence**

Mahler

Das Lied von der Erde^a. Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen^b. Songs from Des Knaben Wunderhorn^c
Yvonne Minton mez ^a**René Kollo** ten
Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Georg Solti
 Decca Eloquence ⑤ ② 482 7169 (97) • DDD
 From Decca ^bSET469/70 (12/70);
^cSET471/2 (2/71); ^aSET555 (11/72)



When Alan Blyth surveyed the extant recordings of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* in these pages a couple of decades ago (8/97), he gave Georg Solti's 1972 Chicago account with Yvonne Minton and René

Kollo short shrift: 'unsympathetic and earthbound', he wrote; Kollo he described as 'tight-toned', the Australian mezzo as 'appealing in tone but impersonal in her utterance'.

The recording was long out of the catalogue; though recently reissued in Decca's big CSO / Solti box (3/18), it is now also made available in slightly more pocket-friendly form by Eloquence to celebrate Minton's 80th birthday, alongside the song recordings originally issued as pairings for Solti's symphony recordings. Listening to *Das Lied*, one can understand Blyth's point, and Kollo's tenor certainly sounds uncomfortable as he struggles against some characteristically full-throttle accompaniment from Solti.

But when it comes to Minton, Solti's go-to mezzo for Mahler, one listener's 'impersonal' is another's 'restrained and touching'. This is classy, subtle and undemonstrative singing, but no worse for that, and if Solti can seem impatient in some of the other songs – Minton has to hang on tight as he gallops through the central section of 'Von der Schönheit' – he takes his time in a moving, patiently built-up account of 'Der Abschied'.

Minton is similarly effective in the *Wunderhorn* and *Fahrenden Gesellen* songs,

where Solti's attention to detail comes across in every bar of the Chicagoans' accompaniment. The sound is detailed and alive, if a little raw-edged. A fine sample of an outstanding and often underrated singer. **Hugo Shirley**

Mozart

Mass in C minor, K427 (ed Clemens Kemme)
Christina Landshamer sop **Anke Vondung** mez
Steve Davislim ten **Tobias Berndt** bar
Bavarian Radio Choir; Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin / Howard Arman
 BR-Klassik M ② 900917 (51' + 73' DDD)
 Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, April 13 & 14, 2018
 Disc 2: 'Wege zur Musik - Mozarts c-moll-Messe: Eine Werkeinführung von Markus Vanhoefer'



Both of the large-scale sacred works of Mozart's Vienna decade remained unfinished. The reason for the Requiem's fragmentary state is simple and mundane: Mozart died before he could finish it. The case of the C minor Mass, however, remains mysterious and scholars are still coming up with new theories concerning the reason for its commission, composition and abandonment. One such is Clemens Kemme, whose PhD thesis is based on the work and his recent completion of it.

While some (Alois Schmitt, Robert Levin, Philip Wilby) have sought to find suitable music for the movements Mozart didn't attempt – the *Credo* from the 'Crucifixus' onwards and the *Agnus Dei* – Kemme offers a version that presents the work itself in the state it was left, with the incomplete movements reorchestrated. Thus he adds trumpets and timpani to the 'Credo in unum Deum', horns to the 'Et incarnatus est' and completes the string parts in both. The *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* require more musicological intervention in the form of complete reconstruction from orchestral parts and partial copies, amplifying eight-part choral fugues from woefully scant original material.

This is, of course, meat and drink to the musicologist, although it is perhaps of less import to the general record buyer. It's true that the opening of the *Credo* requires the celebratory sound of trumpets and there are ample grounds for warming the sound of the pastoral 'Incarnatus' with horns. No one is likely to identify any difference, improvement or otherwise, between Kemme's rebuilt 'Hosanna' fugues and anyone else's. Not that this makes it a futile exercise, you understand, but ...

As to the performance, it displays all the qualities one would expect from one of Germany's foremost period ensembles. The chorus are fine but don't quite match the standards achieved by, for example, the Monteverdi Choir for Gardiner or Accentus for Krivine. And the two ladies meet all Mozart's challenges without effacing memories of McNair and Montague (Gardiner again) or Auger and Dawson (Hogwood).

It's clear, too, that Howard Arman himself has had an input into Kemme's edition as recorded here. Comparison with the score (published last year by Breitkopf & Härtel) shows that the contribution of the trumpets in the 'Credo' is minimised until shortly before the recapitulation (2'11") and the horns in the 'Incarnatus' are so reticent that they might as well not be there. There is a 2012 Sony recording – also from Munich – of what I can only presume to be an interim incarnation of Kemme's edition, in which the trumpets are even more prominent than in the score, and the horns clearly audible. The recorded sound, too, is more open and inviting.

A second disc outlines the present state of research on the C minor Mass but your reviewer's German would not be sufficient to give any more than an inaccurate précis. In all, a package that promises something radical but regrettably, for all its fine points, fails to deliver.

David Threasher

Selected comparisons:

Gardiner (5/88) (PHIL) 420 210-2PH
 Hogwood (7/90) (DECC) 425 528-2OH
 Krivine (1/06) (NAIV) V5032
 Dijkstra (SONY) 88765 47785-2

Parry

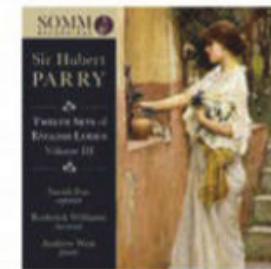
'Twelve Sets of English Lyrics, Vol 3'

English Lyrics: Set 3 - No 5, Through the Ivory Gate^a; Set 4^b - No 1, Thine eyes still shined for me; No 2, When lovers meet again; Set 5^b - A stray nymph of Dian; No 6, A girl to her glass; Set 6^a - No 4, A Lover's Garland; No 5, At the hour the long day ends; Set 7 - No 6, Sleep^a; Set 8^a - No 1, Whence; No 2, Nightfall in Winter; No 5, Looking backward; No 6, Grapes; Set 10^b - No 1, My heart is like a singing bird; No 3, A moment of farewell; No 4, The Child and the Twilight; No 5, From a City Window; Set 11^a - No 1, One Golden Thread; No 3, The Spirit of the Spring; No 4, The Blackbird; No 5, The Faithful Lover; No 6, If I might ride on puissant wing; No 8, She is my love beyond all thought; Set 12^b - No 1, When the dew is falling; No 4, When the sun's great orb; No 7, The sound of hidden music

^aSarah Fox sop ^bRoderick Williams bar

Andrew West pf

Somm F SOMMCD272 (59' DDD T)



Gems abound on this third and final volume in what has been a most enterprising

survey, and I'm happy to report that, as on previous instalments (12/15, 8/18), Sarah Fox and Roderick Williams are at the top of their game throughout. Sample, if you will, the former's thrillingly commanding delivery of the dramatic 'When the sun's great orb' from Set 12 and ecstatic 'My heart is like a singing bird' that opens Set 10 (conceived for the formidably accomplished husband-and-wife team of Agnes Nicholls and Hamilton Harty – and the irresistible curtain-raiser here); and what disarming wonder and expressive ardour Fox brings to 'Thine eyes still shined for me' and 'When lovers meet again' respectively (the first two songs from Set 4).

We are offered no fewer than nine settings of poems by Parry's fellow student at Eton College and Oxford University, John Sturgis (1848–1904), perhaps the most powerful of which comprises 'Through the ivory gate' from Set 3, its dialogue between the dreaming narrator and ghost of a young friend brought to life with touching conviction by Roderick Williams and his excellent accompanist Andrew West (who contributes splendidly throughout, by the way). Likewise, 'The Faithful Lover', 'She is my love beyond all thought' (both from the posthumously published Set 11) and Set 6's entrancing 'A Lover's Garland' show Williams at his lustrous, articulate best. Don't overlook, either, Set 8's devastatingly poignant 'Looking backward' and evocative 'Nightfall in Winter', let alone the sublime 'From a City Window' from Set 10 (surely one of Parry's most enduring creations).

So a joy from start to finish. Jeremy Dibble provides a customarily sage booklet-essay and the sound is commendably truthful to boot. Followers of this valuable series can acquire with confidence. **Andrew Achenbach**

Rihm

Requiem-Strophen

Mojca Erdmann, Anna Prohaska sop

Hanno Müller-Brachmann bar

Bavarian Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra / Mariss Jansons

Neos F NEOS11732 (80' DDD/DSD T)

Recorded live at the Herkulessaal, Munich, March 30, 2017



On top of his game: Roderick Williams brings lustrous conviction to the third volume of Parry's Twelve Sets of English Lyrics



More than any other comparable text, that for the *Missa pro defunctis* has assumed an existence outside of any strictly liturgical consideration. Wolfgang Rihm's *Requiem-Strophen* (2016) is no exception, its treatment (rather than setting) informed by an essentially humanist approach reflected in the recourse to other and ostensibly secular writings. In this sense, his piece goes well beyond the conceptual template of Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* to reference such 'one-offs' as Delius's *Requiem* and Zimmermann's *Requiem für einen jungen Dichter*. That the former emerged during the First World War and the latter was finished just over half a century after it may be significant in terms of Rihm's work, which exudes an unmistakable aura of commemoration through its introspective and (albeit obliquely) devotional content.

Requiem-Strophen divides into four parts, over which the Requiem sequence is interspersed with numerous other writings ranging from the Psalms, via Michelangelo sonnets, to extracts from Rilke and the German lyric poet Johannes Bobrowski.

Its consistently inward mood is leavened by the burnished instrumentation (with lower woodwind and brass to the fore) and the restrained fervency of its vocal writing. Reaching its emotional apex in 'Lacrimosa II', the work concludes with the poem 'Strophen' by Hans Sahl – the idea of 'passing on' here made explicit.

The premiere is directed by Mariss Jansons with a keen sense of expressive continuity across the whole. Jan Brachmann essays a detailed booklet note; while there are no translations of the texts, these can be found online. A work which should amply repay repeated listening.

Richard Whitehouse

A Scarlatti

'Cantate da camera'

Fiero acerbo destin. Imagini d'orroe. O penosa lontananza. Sotto l'ombra d'un faggio. Sovra carro stellato. Tu resti, o mio bel nume

Deborah Cachet sop Scherzi Musicali / Nicholas Achten bar/theorbo/triple hp/org Ricercar (70') • DDD • T/t



Alessandro Scarlatti composed over 700 chamber cantatas, so we

can't be surprised if a new disc serves up what appear to be six premiere recordings. Nor, given the evidence of previous releases, should we have reason to suspect that the well of individual and stimulating compositions has run dry yet. The Arcadian duets and solo cantatas presented here each deal with a different but plausible aspect of the pleasures and pains of love, drawing sensitively tailored responses from their fertile-minded composer. They include a would-be lover too embarrassed to say anything to his adored one, and another who dreams of his love by night, only to curse her hard-heartedness in the light of day. The anguish of separation is explored, and amorous success celebrated in erotic metaphor. The duet *O penosa lontananza* wittily presents two different views of separation simultaneously: 'O painful separation ... I live in weeping' sings Chloris; 'O blessed separation, I live in peace' sings Lydia. Who has not known one or more of these predicaments?

As usual Scarlatti's music flits between Handelian spaciousness and the more compact and direct expression of the late 17th century. Yet consistent to it is a strong lyrical gift and a song-writer's ability to conjure a mood swiftly and effectively. The composer's agile

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A unique release of evocative Japanese music for the saxophone, performed by an artist who specialises in this repertoire, **Masanori Oishi**.

From Yuji Takahashi to Dai Fujikura, this compilation gathers together music by seven Japanese composers from different generations, and Masanori Oishi's rich, expressionistic manipulation of the saxophone's sound perfectly communicates each nuance of these works. Dai Fujikura's compositional gifts have been recognised by prominent European figures including Pierre Boulez, George Benjamin and Péter Eötvös; Fujikura's *SAKANA* was inspired by "the light reflecting upon the body of a fish swimming around in the water." In contrast, Yoichi Sugiyama's *Smoking Prohibited, A Bay Street Ballade* is a topical and moving tribute to Eric Garner, contrasting the American anthem with an African-American spiritual song, *Lay This Body Down*, widely sung during the Civil War era.



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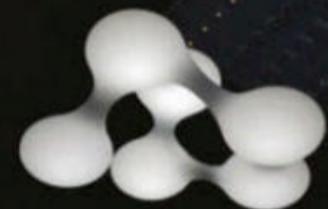


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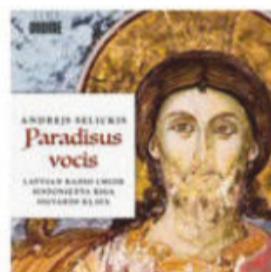
Sigvards Kļava directs the Latvian Radio Choir in superb performances of music by their compatriot Andrejs Selickis

responses to the words – especially in recitative – were criticised by some in his day for trying too hard, but the variety this brings is just what ought to lend it appeal to modern ears wary of when Baroque music gets formulaic.

Variety also characterises the assured and often powerful performances by Scherzi Musicali, who not only continually vary the scoring of accompaniment from a continuo team of harpsichord, organ, three lutes, harp and bass violin but also find for each piece its own appropriate atmosphere. Director Nicolas Achten sings in a penetrating baritone, rather like a lower-lying equivalent of an *haute-contre*, while also playing theorbo and harp; and Deborah Cachet is an immensely pleasing and confident soprano – a voice to listen out for. **Lindsay Kemp**

Selickis

Cherubic Hymn. From My Youth. Hymn to Light - Christ. Litany to Mother Theresa^a. My soul is yearning for heaven. O Crux Christi!. Paradisus vocis. We sing to thee
Latvian Radio Choir; ^aSinfonietta Riga / Sigvards Kļava
Ondine © ODE1327-2 (60' • DDD • T/t)



The music of Andrejs Selickis, a Latvian composer born in 1960, is something of a cultural crossroads. On beginning to listen to the first track on this disc, one might be forgiven for thinking that one was listening to a very refined choir singing Gregorian chant. It then becomes apparent that the text is in fact Slavonic, a setting of *Ot yunosti moeya*, from Byzantine-rite matins. The section after the doxology is polyphonic, somewhat reminiscent of the Russian medieval repertoire, but again with a distinctly Western quality, something emphasised by the astounding precision of the Latvian Radio Choir.

Monody is an essential characteristic of Selickis's work; his melodic style clearly owes a great deal to Russian Znamenny chant and the booklet notes also point to his connections with Old Believer communities. Certainly the most mystical work here is *Paradisus vocis*, which in spite of its Latin title sets texts from the Bible and from the Orthodox Eucharistic Liturgy, as well as the *teretismata* of

late Byzantine usage. This ambitious piece ranges from pure monody to long drone-accompanied melodic arcs to choral clusters and somewhat Tavenerian parallel chords, and while I am not entirely convinced that it is the sum of its parts, it has some extraordinarily effective moments. (Incidentally, the translation 'The Holy Gifts – for the Saints!' is misleading. 'Holy things for the Holy' would be correct.)

The influence of Russian chant and polyphony is also heard in *My Soul is yearning for heaven*, a setting of Yesenin, and here I am entirely convinced by the gradual build-up to its shattering climax. While the *Cherubic Hymn*, *We sing to thee* and *Hymn to Light* (actually a setting of the exaposteilarion for the Ascension) are liturgical pieces, and one can imagine them being used effectively in worship, *O Crux Christi* is very definitely a concert work, and the *Litany to Mother Theresa* even more so (it also makes use of the orchestra) – it is also the most clearly indebted of the pieces recorded here to the work of Arvo Pärt.

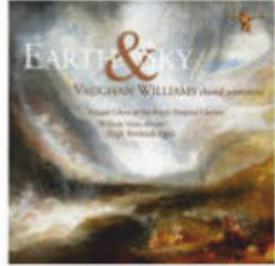
A fascinating introduction to the work of this talented composer, in superb performances recorded in St John's Church in Riga. **Ivan Moody**

Vaughan Williams

'Earth & Sky - Choral Premieres'
 The Airmen's Hymn^a. A Call to the Free Nations^a.
 England, my England^a. A Farmer's Boy. Three
 Gaelic Songs. Hymn for St Margaret of Scotland^a.
 A Hymn of Freedom^a. The Jolly Ploughboy. Land
 of our Birth^a. Little Cloister^a. My soul, praise the
 Lord^a. The New Commonwealth. Old Folks at
 Home. O praise the Lord of Heaven^a. The Songs
 of the Wrens - Three Vocal Valses^b. Sound Sleep^b.
 Tobacco's but an Indian weed. The world it went
 well with me then

Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital, Chelsea /

William Vann ^bpf with ^aHugh Rowlands org
 Albion  ALBCD034 (63' • DDD • T)



Albion Records serves up another treat for all Vaughan Williams fans: over an hour's

worth of choral fare encompassing an agreeable variety of genres in conspicuously accomplished premiere recordings. Contents span nearly six decades, from the three wholly disarming 'vocal valses' from Tennyson's *The Songs of the Wrens* (written for SATB and piano in 1896) to the *Three Gaelic Songs* of 1954 (featuring translations by Ursula Vaughan Williams). Ursula also provided the text for the stirring *Hymn for St Margaret of Scotland* (1950), whose fourth and final verse incorporates a descant from the composer's original manuscript not found in the published version.

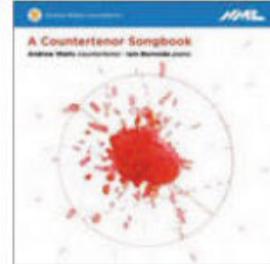
High spots elsewhere include an engaging sequence of male-voice arrangements culminating in the nobly affecting *The New Commonwealth* (from 1943, to the glorious title-theme for Michael Powell's 1941 film *49th Parallel*); a gorgeous setting for SSA and piano of Christina Rossetti's 'Sound Sleep' (1903); the memorable unison tune that clothes Canon George Briggs's words for *A Hymn of Freedom* (1939, and aptly described by one contemporary commentator as 'a very characteristic piece of work by a great melodist who can afford to be simple and direct on a great occasion'); and, perhaps best of all, that magnificent 1913 treatment of Psalm 148, *O Praise the Lord of Heaven* (first heard in St Paul's Cathedral under Walford Davies's lead).

Prospective purchasers can rest assured that these are winningly communicative, admirably disciplined readings from the 23 young singers that make up the Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, under their talented director William Vann. Listen out, too, for a stylish contribution from this august institution's current organ scholar, Hugh Rowlands. Both production

(Andrew Walton) and annotation (John Francis) are likewise exemplary. A job well done! **Andrew Achenbach**

'A Countertenor Songbook'

Bower Songs of Innocence, Op 46 **Cutler** Song for Arthur **T Davies** Song of Pure Nothingness **Finnissy** Dann nicht zu fragen **C Matthews** Un colloque sentimental **Tippett** Songs for Ariel **Yiu** Forget-Me-Not. Symphony - Intermezzo and Movement V **Andrew Watts** counterten **Iain Burnside** pf NMC  NMCD243 (74' • DDD • T/t)



The countertenor voice is often admired for its purity of tone and clarity of

projection, but one shouldn't disregard its versatility and flexibility either – especially when the performer in question is Andrew Watts. In 'A Countertenor Songbook' – a fitting sequel to 'The NMC Songbook' 5/09) – Watts not only succeeds in negotiating a very wide variety of styles, moods and approaches but also imparts each song with a keen sense of its own identity. Not all the songs included here were originally written for countertenor, including Tippett's *Songs for Ariel*, which opens the disc; but the bright, joyful, call-to-attention of 'Come unto these yellow sands', with its quicksilver accompaniment darting back and forth, and the heightened gravitas conveyed in 'Full fathom five' make these songs ideally suited to the nuances of Watts's voice.

We move from the theatre of the world to the theatre of the mind in Michael Finnissy's *Dann nicht zu fragen* ('Then do not ask'). Comprising two songs set to words by the 19th-century German playwright Georg Büchner, dense contrapuntal textures explore a deeply unsettling world, the piano's competing lines like fraught, conflicting voices trapped inside a disturbed mind. Tansy Davies's complex, challenging 'Song of Pure Nothingness', by far the longest song on the disc, delves into similar territory, albeit with more illustrative dramatic gestures and effects.

By contrast, jazz and blues are evoked in Raymond Yiu's cabaret-style 'Forget-Me-Not', while Neville Bower's short Blake cycle occasionally revels in Debussy-like references. A French ambience also imbues Colin Matthews's impressive 17-minute song-cycle *Un colloque sentimental*, whose settings of Baudelaire, Verlaine and other French poets inevitably evokes Fauré and Duparc, sometimes to the point of pitting

more atonal moments against textural luxuriousness in 'Une allée du Luxembourg'. Iain Burnside's impeccable accompaniment is precise and sure-footed throughout. A songbook for all seasons.

Pwyll ap Siôn

'The Ear of Theodoor van Loon'

'Il primo Caravaggisto fiammingo'
Anerio Tibi laus, tibi gloria **Ghersem** Missa Ave
 virgo sanctissima - Agnus Dei **Kempis** Ad te
 suspiro. Symphonia III **Marenzio** O voi che
 sospirate **Mazzocchi** Ahi, chi m'aita. Chiudesti
 i lumi Armida **Philips** Le bel ange du ciel. Hodie
 nobis de caelo **Quagliati** Quando miro il bel
 volto **Soriano** In illo tempore. Missa super
 voces musicales - Agnus Dei **Zamponi** Dies
 irae dies illa

Huelgas Ensemble / Paul Van Nevel

Cypres  CYP1679 (67' • DDD • T)



This is one of those recitals of out-of-the-way repertory in which Paul Van Nevel specialises, intended to accompany the paintings of Theodoor van Loon, a Flemish painter who absorbed the style of early Baroque painting in Rome and introduced it to his homeland. Hence a programme of music that trembles on the verge of the Baroque, marked by Palestrina's Roman pupils on one hand and the painter's contemporaries at the Brussels court of Albert and Isabella of Habsburg on the other.

We so rarely get to hear many of the composers represented here; and if not all of the music is stunningly original, so well is it made that it positively shines when presented in performances as poised and polished as these. Voices and instruments appear separately or judiciously blended, and (for once, I'm tempted to say, and so far as I can judge) Van Nevel plays the notes more or less straight, in the best sense. The Roman material (Soriano, Anerio, Marenzio in particular) is very strong, though Zamponi's *Dies irae* is pretty thin and overstays its welcome. Things pick up with Géry de Ghersem, Nikolaus à Kempis and especially the English Catholic exile Peter Philips, whose eight-voice *Hodie nobis de caelo* finishes as the disc began, with sumptuous eight-part writing, this time with all the performers combined. Even though nearly everything is done one-to-a-part, performances involving several voices seem to me stronger than those where just one part is sung; an exception is the expressive soprano in Philips's lovely berceuse *Le bel*



Versatile and flexible: Andrew Watts surveys a wide variety of styles in 'A Countertenor Songbook'

ange du ciel, a gem of a Christmas scene that arrives just in time. It made me smile.

Fabrice Fitch

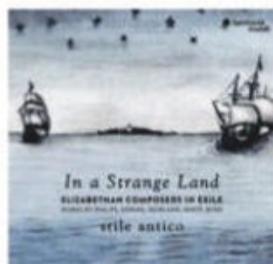
'In a Strange Land'

'Elizabethan Composers in Exile'

Byrd Quomodo cantabimus. Tristia et anxietas
Dering Factum est silentium **Dowland** Flow, my tears. In this trembling shadow **Monte** Super flumina Babylonis **Philips** Gaude Maria virgo. Regina caeli laetare **Watkins** The Phoenix and the Turtle **R White** Lamentations a 5

Stile Antico

Harmonia Mundi Ⓜ HMM90 2266 (72' • DDD • T/t)



Exile, for Edward Said, was not only banishment but a crucial separation from cultural identity; a sense of not feeling at home in one's home, which is what unites the Elizabethan composers on this new album from Stile Antico. 'In a Strange Land' presents Catholic composers working abroad with those who stayed in Protestant England, estranged from Rome.

Dowland's famous pavane *Flow my tears* opens the album, performed as a part-song rather than the more familiar lute-song

beloved of countertenors. Stile Antico, as ever, excel in plangency, singing slowly with two voices per part and leaning into the famous descending 'lachrimae' motif. It's beautiful, but ponderous compared to Dowland's more madrigalian *In this trembling shadow* a few tracks later. Here the initial use of single voices per part brings immediacy and intimacy, which serves the chromaticism with poignancy. Dowland's penchant for melancholy is infamous but in the hands of Byrd it is strikingly political. In *Tristitia et anxietas* Stile Antico find a slow burn of sorrow in Byrd's churning harmonies and focus on rich, low sonorities, allowing for a lightening of interpretation in the more hopeful second half.

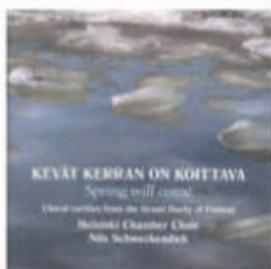
Old Testament texts concerning the Babylonian or Egyptian captivity often indicated Catholic sympathies, as did the metaphorical use of 'Jerusalem' to pray for 'England'. That Byrd survived making such overt references is testament to the esteem in which he was held by Elizabeth I. In an exchange of motets with his Flemish contemporary Philippe de Monte drawing on Psalm 136, de Monte asks 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' (*Super flumina Babylonis*). To which Byrd responds, 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,

let my right hand forget her cunning' (*Quomodo cantabimus*). Stile Antico's interpretation of de Monte's motet is gently questioning yet I prefer a firmer tracing of the shapely depictions of harps hanging abandoned on the willows. Their sound is meltingly gorgeous but I maintain a preference for the gritty passion of The Cardinall's Musick under Andrew Carwood (ASV, A/99). Similarly with Byrd's hopeful reply: Stile Antico allow the texture to unfold with a gentle flow in what is some superb singing but I long for a more treble-dominated balance for such pointed texts. They find this in Huw Watkins's setting of Shakespeare, *The Phoenix and the Turtle*. Here, especially towards the end, they employ the sort of energy I would love to hear them bring to Byrd. Edward Breen

'Spring Will Come'

'Choral Rarities from the Grand Duchy of Finland'

Choral works by **Borenius, Collan, Crusell, Ehrström, Genetz, Hagfors, Hannikainen, Järnefelt, Kajanus, Kiljander, Laethén, Leppänen, Linsén, Melartin, O Merikanto, Moring, Pacius and Traditional Helsinki Chamber Choir / Nils Schweckendiek**



Sibelius was not the first composer from Finland, and here Nils Schweckendiek and the Helsinki Chamber Choir shine a light on figures who were active up to the point of the country's independence from Russia in 1917. Many of the works included were written in Swedish or German in the latter half of the 19th century and suppressed or straitjacketed into the Finnish language during the country's nationalistic awakening. Here, they are dusted down and heard in their original tongues.

On one level, we sense what a radical and refreshing voice Sibelius's must have been. On another, we hear technically secure composers with strong instincts and, occasionally, the green shoots of a distinctive national voice. Spring works neatly as a both a seasonal and political theme, and 'Spring Morning' by Fredrik Pacius – the German national who kick-started Finland's music life and wrote the Finnish national anthem – suggests music bursting at the seams of what the composer tried to sew into it structurally. The performance here might have been a little slower and more considered. But despite occasional strain in the soprano group, the Helsinki Chamber Choir otherwise sing with precision, body, good diction and some variation in colour.

Other works of interest include Rafael Laethén's 'Evening Song'; there was a strong tradition of choral evening serenades in the Nordic countries but this one is notably more matter-of-fact despite some sense of inner glow. Where we do hear the Finnish language, it's interesting how its more pointillist sound shapes the musical texture (as in Emil Sivori's arrangement of 'Joy and Sorrow') while, in contrast, the harmonic stasis of Pekka Juhani Hannikainen's 'The Singing Girl from Punkaharju' feels like a premonition of Sibelian minimalism (though the exact date of the song isn't stated and he died in 1924, so Hannikainen may well have heard *Tapiola*).

As the pre-eminent songwriter of the day, Oskar Merikanto's works don't disappoint, but still it's diverting to hear the overlapping textures of his 'In the East Wind'. Perhaps the most distinctive voice is that of Armas Järnefelt, who weaves longer stories in his works and allows the shape of Finnish words to dictate the contours of the phrase – the technique his brother-in-law would make his own. Among a great deal of middle-of-the-road

19th-century fare, his 'The Path of the Beloved' stands out from its opening chord.

Andrew Mellor

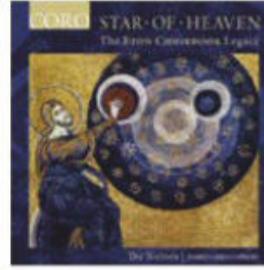
'Star of Heaven'

'The Eton Choirbook Legacy'

Cooke Ave Maria, mater Dei **Cornish Ave Maria**,
mater Dei **Galvani** Stella coeli **Hough Hallowed Lambe** Nesciens mater. Stella coeli **MacMillan**
O virgo prudentissima **Phibbs** Nesciens mater
Wylkynson Salve regina

The Sixteen / Harry Christophers

Coro Ⓛ COR16166 (67' • DDD • T/t)



There can be few ensembles with such a close understanding of the late 15th-century music preserved in the Eton Choirbook and performances by The Sixteen have always been characterised by radiant high sopranos and deliciously bright altos supported by warmly crafted lower voices. This new album brings together Marian works from this famous manuscript with new compositions, specially commissioned by The Genesis Foundation, all united by the special sound of this ensemble.

There are three paired texts on this disc, beginning with *Nesciens mater* in a generous and expansive setting by Walter Lambe (1450-1504) followed by a new work by Joseph Phibbs (b1974), a contemplative homophony from which The Sixteen draw rich sonorities. The *Ave Maria, mater Dei* by William Cornish (1465-1523), with all its nimble phrasing, is paired with a particularly sumptuous setting by Phillip Cooke (b1980) where two offstage sopranos swirl around a wonderfully atmospheric and transportive choral texture. Lambe's *Stella caeli* is paired with an impassioned setting by Marco Galvani (b1994).

In the middle of this programme sits James MacMillan's *O virgo prudentissima*, Tudor-esque in proportion and based on a surviving fragment by Robert Wylkynson (c1450-1515). These singers excel in each and every choral texture MacMillan uses, from humming to 'heterophonic haze'. This is a sumptuous, statuesque work and an equally sumptuous and impressive performance which boasts a ravishing, high solo by Julie Cooper. The disc ends with Stephen Hough's *Hallowed*, a poignant setting of four texts crossing religious boundaries in contemplation of the human experience. There is witty word-painting in his setting of 'Staying the night in a mountain temple' and an outpouring of joy in the Navajo Indian 'Song of the Earth', with its repeated phrase 'all is beautiful'.

For me, 'Song of the Earth' is slightly too careful in performance – 'beautiful' contains an unforgiving diphthong – but the luxuriant setting of 'Pater noster' led by the velvet tones of Ben Davies brings this superb album to a wonderful close.

Edward Breen

'Then and There, Here and Now'

Alexander/Whitaker Straight Street Arcadelt

Il bianco e dolce signo **M Bates** Stelle, vostra

mercé **Byrd** Ave verum corpus **Gershwin**

Summertime **Hawley** Io son la primavera

Lassus Surrexit pastor bonus **McGlynn**

Dúlamán **Morley** Now is the month of maying

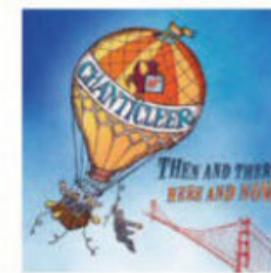
Palestrina Gaude gloriosa **Salazar** Salve regina

Sametz I have had singing **Secunda** Bei mir bist du schön **Shearer** Nude Descending a Staircase

Stucky Whispers **Traditional** Hark, I hear the harps eternal. I want to die easy. Járba, máré járbá. Keep your hand on the plow

Chanticleer

Warner Classics Ⓛ 9029 56177-8 (57' • DDD • T/t)



There's a real sense of exhilaration to 'Then and There, Here and Now' – the

40th-anniversary album by America's all-male *a cappella* ensemble Chanticleer. The group's 12 singers move from Palestrina to Gershwin, via gospel, Appalachian folk, jazz and contemporary choral with utter plausibility and apparently equal ease; not bad for a group originally founded for historically informed performances of polyphony. You wait for that slight disconnect, the cringe that comes from trained singers aping the untutored tone of popular genres, and it just doesn't come in performances that combine serious technique (and a four-octave range spanned at the upper extremes by some of the best countertenors in the business) with an unfussy directness.

A 'best of' collection of repertoire is mostly recorded fresh, with the occasional re-release also in the mix. Best is the secular music, where there's a consistent sense of off-duty fun, whether they're singing Morley's *Now is the month of maying* (actually joyful rather than just camp) or Sholom Secunda's *Bei mir bist du schön*, and Kirby Shaw's slick arrangement of 'Summertime' is a standout, thanks to ravishing solos from countertenors Cortez Mitchell and Timothy Keeler.

If there's a tiny gripe (and it really is tiny), then it's that the studio recording flattens the tone out a bit too much. Michael McGlynn's earthy *Dúlamán*



The Helsinki Chamber Choir and Nils Schweckendiek survey Finnish choral music from the years before Sibelius and the country's independence

(which has a properly percussive kick in Anuna's own recording) here sits a little too lightly in the space, as do some of the feistier spirituals. **Alexandra Coglan**

'War & Peace 1618:1918' G
H Albert Ich steh in Angst und Pein. Letzte Rede
einer vormals stolzen und gleich jetzt
sterbenden Jungfrauen **Anonymous** Schlaf,
Kindlein, schlaf. Schnitter Tod **Eisler** An den
kleinen Radioapparat. Elegie I. Über den
Selbstmord. Und es sind die finstren Zeiten. Und
ich werde nicht mehr sehen das Land **M Franck**
In illo tempore **Hammerschmidt** Die Kunst des
Küssens. O barmherziger Vater **Hildebrand** Ach,
Herr! Du Erbarmer der Menschen. Nun, Herr, du
bist ja ein allmächtiger **Hollaender** Currende.
Die Hungerkünstlerin. In den Abendwind
geflüstert. Wenn ick mal tot bin. Wiegenlied an
eine Mutter **Isaac** Vanitas! Vanitatum Vanitas!
Satie Gnossienne No 3. Gymnopédie No 1
Scheidt Galliard battaglia, SWV59. Galliard
cantus XX. Paduan cantus V. Von Gott will ich
nicht lassen **Schütz** Erbarm dich mein, SWV447.
Lobe den Herren, SWV39. Verleih uns Frieden,
SWV372 **Traditional** Es geht ein dunkle Wolk
herein (arr Eisler)
Dorothee Mields sop
Lautten Compagney / Wolfgang Katschner
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi M ② 19075 86844-2
(81' • DDD • T/t)



Fear, pain,
desperation,
gallows humour,
longing for peace:
experiences of war have changed little
since earliest record. But what about the
art that emerges from it? In a beautifully
conceived and constructed recital, the
soprano Dorothee Mields and the German
early music ensemble Lautten Compagney
invite us to compare and contrast the music
of conflicts divided by exactly 300 years. In
an anniversary year that marks both the
start of the Thirty Years War and the end
of the First World War, music by Schütz,
Scheidt and Isaac finds itself standing
shoulder to shoulder with songs by Hanns
Eisler and Friedrich Hollaender.

Rather than divide the two discs by era,
Mields and her collaborators organise their
material thematically. You can see why –
it's an approach that draws out musical
connections and collides repertoire for
maximum drama, jolting us from a severe
Lutheran chorale into sardonic Weimar
cabaret – and enables some clever
arrangements by Bo Wiget that bring
contemporary irony into traditional

songs and traditional instruments into
wartime Berlin.

Satie's *Gymnopédies* get a homespun,
hurdy-gurdy quality as arranged for early
instruments, as well as something of the
sinister churn of 'Der Leermann', while
the cornett becomes suddenly bluesy and
sardonic in Hollaender's darkly cynical
songs (sample lyric 'Was my father
a prince or a drunkard?'). We get
a wonderful range here from the
grotesque excesses of the composer's
'Die Hungerkünstlerin' to the repressed
bitterness of 'In den Abdenwind geflüstert'
but it's the Eisler songs that are the
standouts – their quieter ironies destroying
you as bladed lyrics stab through smiling
melodies. It's brutal stuff.

Mields is impeccable throughout, the
pristine purity of the early songs setting
off the calculated exaggerations and
distortions of the contemporary ones.
This is a brilliant, unexpected disc, but
cries out for the energy and audience
interplay of a live performance.

Alexandra Coglan

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WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **James Jolly**'s point of departure is ...

Brahms's Violin Concerto (1878)

Much as Beethoven's *Eroica* (1803) redefined the symphony in ambition and scope, so Brahms's only Violin Concerto raised the stakes for violinists. There are many references in it to Beethoven's Violin Concerto: they are of a similar length, both are in D, and so on – but Brahms's seems a size or two bigger. It's a towering creation that feels enormous. Premiered by Joseph Joachim (in a programme that opened with the Beethoven – 'It was a lot of D major,' said Brahms), it defeated some early virtuosos like Wieniawski but has since become central to every violinist's repertoire. There are numerous magnificent recordings: I'm opting for Kavakos's glorious Leipzig one with Chailly.

● Leonidas Kavakos *vn* Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly (Decca, 12/13)

1 Staying with Brahms

Brahms Piano Quartet No 1 (1861) This is the piano quartet that Schoenberg orchestrated in 1937 at the request of Otto Klemperer,

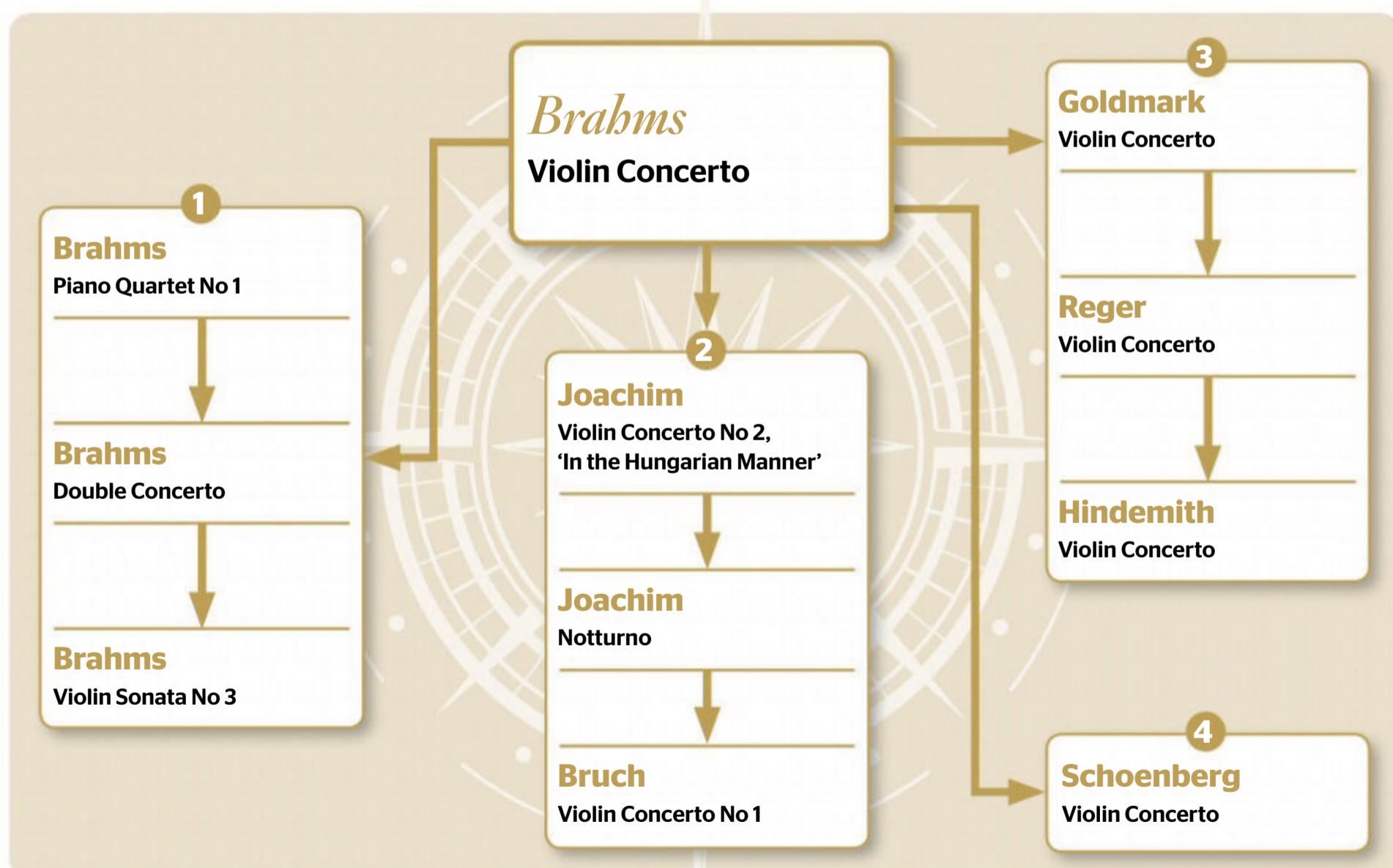
throwing a very un-Brahmsian instrumental armoury at it. But in its original state, for just four players, it has grace as well as that terrific gypsy rondo finale. The characteristic Hungarian sound that infuses so much of Brahms's music steps dramatically to the fore here.

● Martha Argerich *p*f Gidon Kremer *vn* Yuri Bashmet *va* Mischa Maisky *vc* (DG, 4/04)

Brahms Double Concerto (1887) Brahms fell out with Joachim over the latter's divorce, and with this piece relations were patched up. It's gentler in mood than the Violin Concerto and the presence of two soloists creates an atmosphere of intimacy. The sense of resolution between the two, beautifully evoked after a series of hesitant gestures, is superbly handled.

● Renaud Capuçon *vn* Gautier Capuçon *vc* Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra / Myung-Whun Chung (Erato, 2/08)

Brahms Violin Sonata No 3 (1888) The key of D minor recalls Brahms's First Piano Concerto, and this powerful four-movement





The Austro-Hungarian violinist and composer Joseph Joachim (1831-1907), a hugely important figure in 19th-century violin playing, and a muse for Brahms

piece tests the pianist as much as it does the violinist. Like the Violin Concerto, it's full of grand gestures and long, song-filled phrases.

● Leonidas Kavakos *vn* Yuja Wang *pf* (Decca, 7/14)

2 The Joachim connection

Joachim Violin Concerto No 2, 'In the Hungarian Manner' (1857)

Rarely performed and recorded, this deserves to be heard more often; its length of over 40 minutes probably doesn't help its cause. It makes a fascinating comparison with the Brahms (with which Tetzlaff couples it on this fine recording). The Hungarian element, so crucial to Brahms's writing, permeates the finale, giving it drama aplenty and the soloist much to do.

● Christian Tetzlaff *vn* Danish Nat SO / Thomas Dausgaard (Erato, 5/08)

Joachim Notturno (1858) Joachim the composer, unsurprisingly, writes gloriously for the violin. This short *concertante* work predates the Brahms by 20 years yet breathes the same atmosphere as its slow movement (with slightly more salonish orchestral writing). The soloist's double-stopping makes for remarkable textures which are suspended over gently swirling accompaniment – with magical effect.

● Daniel Hope *vn* Royal Stockholm PO / Sakari Oramo (DG, 5/11)

Bruch Violin Concerto No 1 (1866) Probably the most popular violin concerto of all, this work has a strong connection to Joachim – who not only provided considerable input into its revision after the 1866 premiere but also played the premiere of that second version. It takes its structure from Mendelssohn's concerto in having three movements that play almost continuously. Again, Hungarian rhythms buoy up the finale, no doubt in a nod to Joachim's heritage. In a fine performance it's easy to understand its popularity: it simply gives the audience everything!

● Kyung Wha Chung *vn* LPO / Klaus Tennstedt (Warner Classics, 6/92)

3 Big Austro-German violin concertos

Goldmark Violin Concerto (1877) Once enormously popular, and now the recipient of the occasional recording (though some

pretty big names tackled it in the past), the Hungarian-born Vienna-based Goldmark's sole violin concerto reveals a gift for melody, with which it abounds. The piece is striking for its inspired use of solo versus *tutti* passages, creating fascinating textures and tensions.

● Joshua Bell *vn* Los Angeles PO / Esa-Pekka Salonen (Sony, 4/00)

Reger Violin Concerto (1908) Despite the faithful championing of the work by Adolf Busch, Reger's colossal concerto (it lasts a few minutes shy of an hour) has never established a foothold in the concert hall. Reger saw it very much in the great Germanic tradition and as a direct descendant of the Brahms (and there's even a thematic link to the Brahms concerto in the rich and highly varied finale).

● Benjamin Schmid *vn* Tampere PO / Hannu Lintu (Ondine, 2/13)

Hindemith Violin Concerto (1939) Commissioned by Willem Mengelberg, who conducted its premiere in Amsterdam, Hindemith's sole concerto (though a *concertante* work for violin does nestle among the Kammermusik pieces) is one of his most expressive and songful works. His skill at orchestration is evident as the violin line soars out of the might of a brass-dominated *tutti* section to rewarding effect.

● Frank Peter Zimmermann *vn* Frankfurt RSO / Paavo Järvi (BIS, 9/13)

4 The German concerto in America

Schoenberg Violin Concerto (1936) Well known for his admiration of Brahms, Schoenberg wrote his Violin Concerto in California, having moved to the States three years earlier. Though composed using the 12-note technique, the work nonetheless has a strong emotional pull thanks in part to the crystalline beauty of the orchestral writing. The solo part is fiendishly difficult (Heifetz wouldn't touch it), but once the piece has cast its spell over you, it's hard to ignore.

● Hilary Hahn *vn* Swedish RSO / Esa-Pekka Salonen (DG, 6/08)

Available to stream at Qobuz, Apple Music and Spotify

Opera



Neil Fisher gets acquainted with Anton Rubinstein's epic Moses:
'The dominant metre is the gentle throb of Mendelssohn – and his pulsing choral climaxes – with a dash of Wagner' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**



Alexandra Coglan hears a Caesar-inspired album from Raffaele Pe:
'The stylistic span is broad, and we move from crisp Baroque rhythms to melting Mozartian grace' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**

Bellini

Norma

Sondra Radvanovsky sop.....	Norma
Joyce DiDonato mez.....	Adalgisa
Joseph Calleja ten.....	Pollione
Matthew Rose bass.....	Oroveso
Michelle Bradley sop.....	Clotilde
Adam Diegel ten.....	Flavio

Chorus and Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera,

New York / Carlo Rizzi

Stage director Sir David McVicar

Video director Gary Halvorson

Erato F ② DVD 9029 56297-6;
F Blu-ray Disc 9029 56297-5 (169' + 15' • NTSC • 16:9 •

1080i • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, October 7, 2017

Includes synopsis



This is the third filmed version of *Norma* to have appeared in the past year and, for me, the best – at least in musical terms.

Unlike its main rival, from Covent Garden, it features not only a compelling Norma but also an Adalgisa in danger of stealing the show as well as her man. In Sondra Radvanovsky and Joyce DiDonato the Met production has two singers at the height of their formidable powers.

Radvanovsky admittedly makes a bit of a slow start – you'll hear more seamless and melting 'Casta divas' elsewhere – but the voice only grows in authority as the evening progresses: firm and focused, and big and beautiful. And it is backed up by a formidable technical arsenal allied to the sort of grand, old-school artistry we see too rarely these days. DiDonato's artistry here is no less impressive and she's profoundly moving as a gamine, innocent and big-hearted Aldalgisa, the voice, distinguished by a hint of quick vibrato, employed with imagination and a wonderful sense of *bel canto* style.

Beside these two, Joseph Calleja's Pollione (also heard on the Covent Garden film) offers virtues of a less subtle sort, perhaps, and he tires during the course



of his big Act 1 scene with Adalgisa. The voice itself, bright and open and also characterised by a quick vibrato, is on robuster form than elsewhere recently, and there's enormous pleasure to be had from singing of such generosity and ardency. Matthew Rose is on noble form as Oroveso, and watch out for Michelle Bradley's moving Clotilde, sung in an impressively rich and steady mezzo. Carlo Rizzi's love for the score comes across in every bar; he conducts the Met Orchestra superbly and they play gloriously for him.

David McVicar deserves praise for bringing out such moving acting from Radvanovsky and DiDonato in particular but the production itself is less satisfying. Robert Jones's set – a fantasy forest under which is hidden a vast fake-looking hut for Norma's home – resembles something out of *Lord of the Rings*, and the director piles in too many of the snarling, overacting extras of which he is so fond. Less here would certainly have been more, and the prosaic production adds little to the poetry of the singing – especially at the close. The camerawork for Met relays seems to be getting ever more tricksy and over-elaborate, too. Happily, though, none of this significantly detracts from some glorious central performances, conducting and playing. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

Pappano (OPAR) (1/18) DVD OA1247D;
Blu-ray Disc OABD7225D

Campra

L'Europe galante

Caroline Mutel sop.....	Vénus/Une Espagnole/Olimpia/Roxane
Isabelle Druet mez.....	La Discorde/Doris/Une femme du Bal/Zaïde
Heather Newhouse sop.....	Une Grâce/Céphise/
Anders Dahlin ten.....	Une Espagnole/Une femme du Bal
Nicolas Courjal bass.....	Philène/Dom Pedro/Octavio
Jérémie Delvert bar.....	Silvandre/Dom Carlos/Zuliman
Les Nouveaux Caractères / Sébastien d'Héritier	Le Bostangis
Château de Versailles Spectacles	(123' • DDD)

Includes libretto and translation



Incredibly, this is the first complete recording of Campra's innovative *opéra-ballet*

L'Europe galante (1697); La Petite Bande and Gustav Leonhardt recorded only extracts in 1973. It is one of several flagship releases launching the new label of Château de Versailles, where Les Nouveaux Caractères' spirited performance was recorded. Sébastien d'Héritier directs with optimal attention to effervescent small details, occasionally at the expense of broader brush-strokes – from time to time the quick-paced momentum of the music-making could afford to relax in the service of gentler gracefulness. The vividness of the orchestral playing guarantees manifold colours and moods, although there are a few numbers in which the trigger-happy percussionist might have valued discretion as the better part of valour (a Canaries dance towards the end of the prologue sounds like a pantomime donkey has clattered on to the stage).

In the prologue, Discord bickers superciliously with the offended Venus's insistence that love is to be found all over the nations of Europe. The first entrée (France) is a pastoral depiction of the transient amorous loyalties of fickle shepherds – Nicolas Courjal's ardent Silvandre arranges a divertissement to entertain the immune Céphise, whose dulcet beauty is given instant credence by Heather Newhouse's silken singing of her entrance air (bewailing that she is heartily fed up with all the attention she gets every few days from different men). It transpires that only two days earlier Silvandre had sworn undying love to Doris – who concludes the entrée with a heartbroken soliloquy sung touchingly by Isabelle Druet. The second entrée is a pair of quixotic Spaniards singing their night-time serenades under the balconies of their respective mistresses; Dom Pedro's sensual *sommeil* is sung mellifluously by Anders



Norma from the Met: Sondra Radvanovsky and Joyce DiDonato give glorious performances as Bellini's central characters

Dahlin, accompanied by melancholic strings and soft flutes (this chaconne alone is worth the price of admission), whereas under a nearby balcony Dom Carlos (not that one) sings an impassioned love song of a brooder character. It is unsurprising that castanets make a noisy appearance in the Spanish dances – clearly the whole street is going to be awoken – but a little Spanish song sung ‘by a lady musician’ is delivered by Caroline Mutel with impeccable translucence.

The third entrée is a Venetian masked ball: Olimpia rebuffs the jealous Octavio, who pretends to murder his rival but is then despondent upon witnessing her grief. Assorted little airs with chorus refrains and chaconnes for the masqueraders feature excellent contributions from the woodwinds. The last entrée is set in a Turkish seraglio; the slave Zäide (not that one) and Roxane compete for the attention of the sultan Zuliman; after Roxane attempts to stab her rival, the sultan opts decisively for Zäide (whose opening soliloquy professing her unrequited love is sung eloquently by Druet). The celebration of the triumph of love culminates in a lively succession of songs, choruses and dances for the

Ottoman imperial guards, including a janissary band of percussion that is performed spicily. Having been an obvious lacuna in the discography for so long, this is essential listening for all admirers of French Baroque opera. **David Vickers**

Korngold

Das Wunder der Heliane

Annemarie Kremer sop Heliane

Aris Argiris bar Ruler

Ian Storey ten Stranger

Katerina Hebelková contr Messenger

Frank van Hove bass Gatekeeper

Nutthaporn Thammathi ten Blind Judge

György Hanczár ten Young Man

Oper Freiburg Chorus; Freiburg Bach Choir;

Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Fabrice Bollon

Naxos ② ③ 8 660410/12 (162' • DDD)

Includes synopsis



A new recording of *Das Wunder der Heliane* is, by definition, an event. The premiere recording in 1993 marked the launch of Decca's seminal Entartete Musik series, and to some extent lifted the

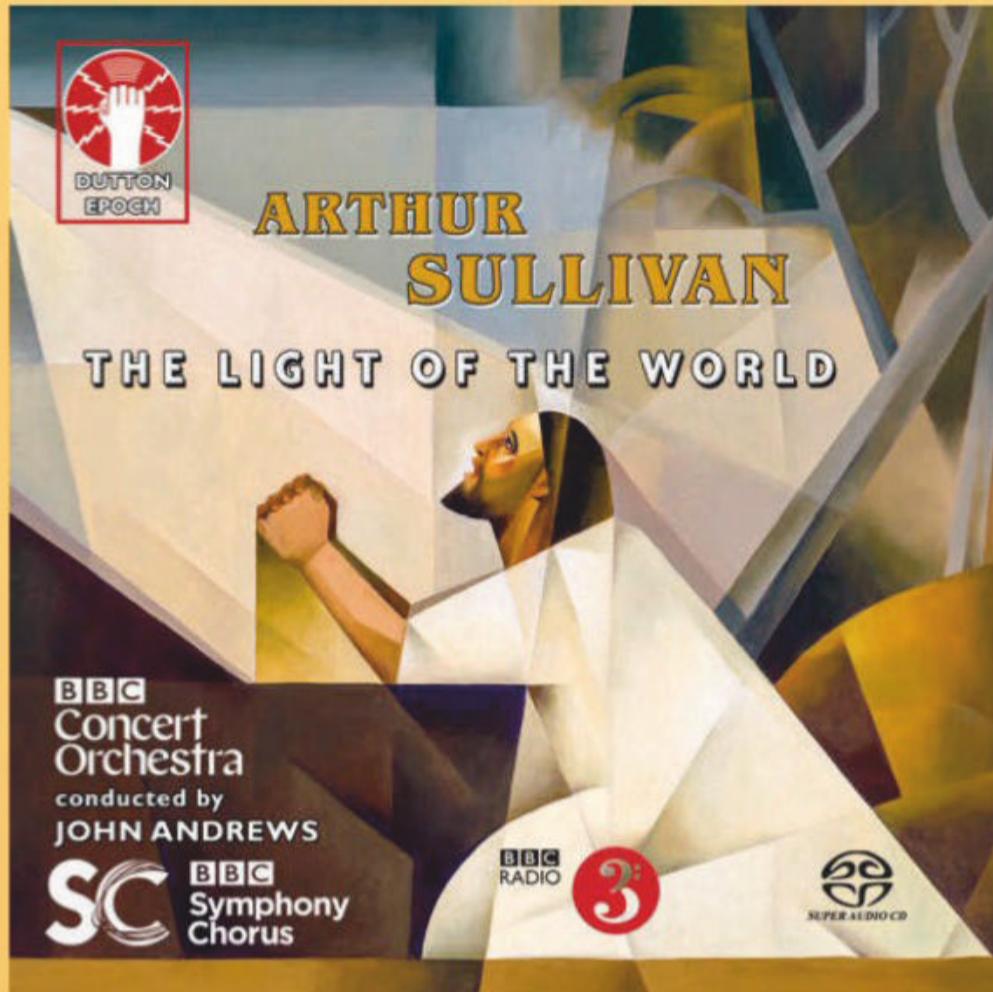
jinx on the opera that Korngold considered his masterpiece, and whose troubled birth in 1927 blighted his later career. A massive, allegorical drama of love's triumph over evil, composed in a style that is (to quote Michael Haas) ‘not so much post-romantic as hyper-romantic’, *Heliane*'s opulence, mysticism and vaulting ambition makes *Die Frau ohne Schatten* look like *Hänsel und Gretel*.

This new release from Naxos is only the second complete recording: a venture which, whatever its strengths and failings, deserves respect. First impressions are good, with Fabrice Bollon conducting the heavenly-chorus prelude in a warm, sculpted sweep of music, the Freiburg forces clearly unfazed by the multi-layered intricacy of Korngold's orchestral writing. The story concerns a tyrannical Ruler, his unhappy wife Heliane and a compassionate, Christ-like Stranger, and *Heliane* really stands or falls on these three roles.

The original 1927 production featured Lotte Lehmann and Jan Kiepura, no less; the concert performances from which this recording was made have altogether less star-power. Which is not to say that the singing is unattractive, though taken as a whole it's on the pale side. You do sense



DUTTON EPOCH NEW RELEASE

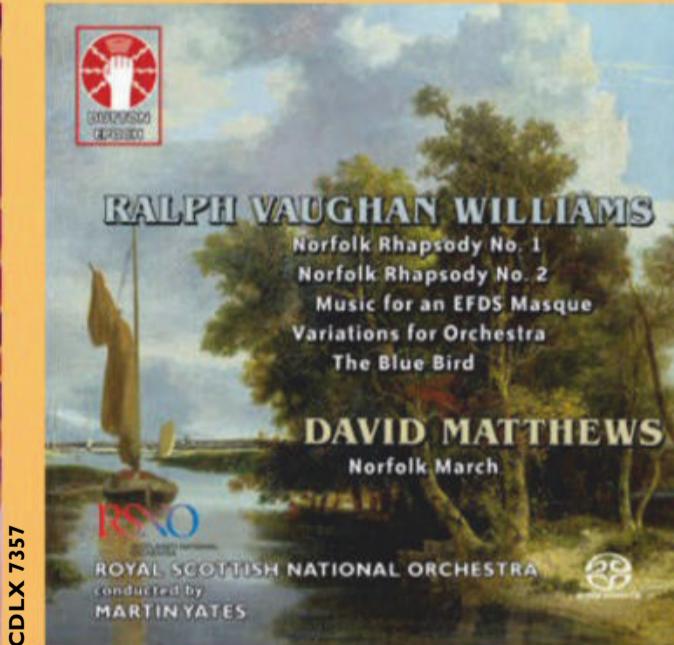


ARTHUR SULLIVAN *The Light of the World* Commissioned for and first produced at the Birmingham Musical Festival of 1873, *The Light of the World* is Arthur Sullivan's great oratorio on the life of Christ. Although regularly performed during the composer's lifetime, changing fashions gradually condemned the work to obscurity. Occasional revivals have failed to make the case for it, primarily because it was not understood that *The Light of the World* is essentially a dramatic work, rather than a purely religious one. When Dutton Epoch and the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society came to record the work, this new understanding enabled a completely different approach to be taken – the result is a vibrant performance by the BBC Symphony Chorus and the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by John Andrews. They are supported by the Kinder Children's Choir and a fine team of soloists: Natalya Romaniw and Eleanor Dennis (sopranos), Kitty Whately (contralto), Robert Murray (tenor), Ben McAtee (baritone) and Neal Davies (bass).

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WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING



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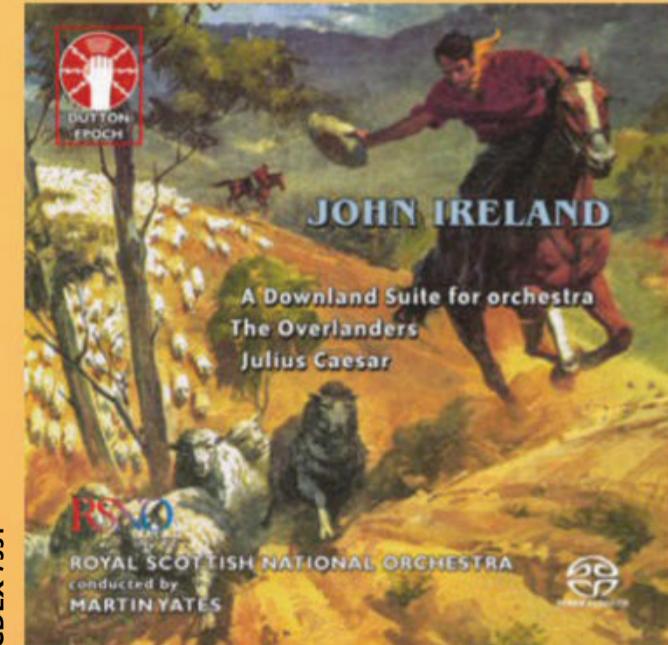


RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
The Blue Bird etc.
ROYAL SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA | MARTIN YATES
INCLUDES WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS



HAVERGAL BRIAN *The Vision of Cleopatra* Dutton Epoch's first recording with the orchestra and chorus of English National Opera surveys the music of Havergal Brian. The dramatic and operatic setting of *The Vision of Cleopatra* (1907), the scores and parts of which were lost in wartime bombing, has been orchestrated from the vocal score by composer John Pickard. This epic cantata is vividly brought to life by a line-up of brilliant young soloists – Claudia Boyle (soprano), Angharad Lyddon (mezzo-soprano), Claudia Huckle (contralto) and Peter Auty (tenor) – while the ENO Orchestra and Chorus are in top form under the authoritative direction of conductor Martyn Brabbins. Brian's *Two Choral Pieces* (1912), the tuneful concert overture *For Valour* (1904 rev. 1906) and the delightful *Fantastic Variations on an Old Rhyme* (1907) complete a compelling release.

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A lot of coming and going: Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* is reimagined in Berlin - see review on page 90

the (perfectly understandable) strain on the principals in the big moments, and there's a certain score-bound quality in (for example) the Act 1 confrontation between the Stranger (Ian Storey) and the Ruler (Aris Argiris), as well as Act 3's climactic showdown. Ideally, you'd hope for more black, ringing vehemence from the Ruler, and greater radiance from the Stranger.

Annemarie Kremer, as Heliane, is at her most affecting in the quieter moments: the fragility that she brings to her great Act 2 aria 'Ich ging zu ihm' makes it, quite properly, the heart of the whole drama. She's shakier when she really has to soar, though again that's understandable, and there's a glow to her voice that's well suited to Heliane's chaste sensuality. Of the smaller roles, Nutthaporn Thammathi as the Blind Judge and Frank van Hove as the Gatekeeper sound disconcertingly youthful, and Katerina Hebelková brilliantly captures the Messenger's brittle ferocity. The choral singing is fervent, and blends richly with the orchestral playing – which, under Bollon's shapely, impassioned direction is the real glory of this performance. Korngold's silken swathes of art nouveau sonority never feel self-indulgent or amorphous.

Naxos, in best Ryanair style, provides a basic synopsis but no printed libretto, and I couldn't find any way to download one either. That's a serious black mark in repertoire as rare as this, though not a problem if you already have the Decca recording – which for quality of singing, and sense of drama, still outclasses this new release on all fronts. But serious Korngold fans will want both, and for the Korngold-curious, Naxos offers a sincere and often stirring opportunity to discover this extraordinary opera. Hopefully we won't have to wait another quarter of a century for the next.

Richard Bratby

Comparative version:

Mauceri (4/93^R) (DECC) 478 3429DHO3

Martinů

What Men Live By^a. Symphony No 1, H289^b

^aIvan Kusnjer bar Martin Avdeitch

^aPeter Svoboda bass Old Peasant

^aJan Martiník bass Stepanitch

^aLucie Silkenová sop Woman with Child

^aEster Pavlů contr Old Woman

^aJaroslav Březina ten Narrator

^aJosef Špaček spkr Narrator

^aLukáš Mareček spkr A Boy

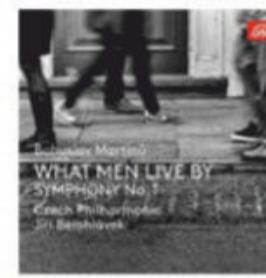
Martinů Voices; Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Jiří Bělohlávek

Supraphon Ⓜ SU4233-2 (76' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum, Prague, ^aDecember 17-19, 2014;

^bJanuary 13-15, 2016

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Depending how you count them, there are 16 Martinů operas, ranging from single-actors – *Alexandre bis* (1937) and *Ariane* (1958) – to the full-evening *Julietta* (1937) and *The Greek Passion* (1957-59). The 'opera-pastoral in one act' *What Men Live By* (1952) inhabits an expressive world somewhere between *Ariane* and the folk cantata *Kytice* (2/18). *What Men Live By* was also Martinů's first opera since *Julietta* and *Alexandre bis*, which had been completed in pre-war Paris, and was composed following the final staging of his 1935 one-act *Comedy on the Bridge* in New York in 1951.

The scenario, from Tolstoy's short story *Where Love Is, God Is*, is straightforward and charming: a lonely cobbler finds solace in reading the Bible and, in a dream, is promised a visit from Christ the next day. Only after he has helped out, in turn, an

old soldier, a poor woman with an infant, and a boy trying to steal an apple, does he realise that the visit from the Saviour was not quite in the form he had expected. Martinů's limpid score counterpoints and underlines the action with beautifully understated finesse and perfect pacing. This all-Czech performance from December 2014 uses the original English text and is enchanting, the odd stilted pronunciation aside (eg 'gal-O-shes')!

The coupling of the First Symphony (1942) is especially poignant, the last recording of a Martinů work by the late Jiri Bělohlávek. As might be imagined, there are few interpretative differences between this version, recorded live with the Czech PO in the wonderful Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague, and the Gramophone Award-winning account with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. While this new, final account does not displace the older one, with this orchestra in that hall, it is something special. If I sound misty-eyed, well I am.

Guy Rickards

Symphony No 1 – selected comparison:
BBC SO, Bělohlávek (4/12) (ONYX) ONYX4082

Mozart



Le nozze di Figaro

Lauri Vasar bass-bar.....Figaro
Anna Prohaska sop.....Susanna
Ildebrando D'Arcangelo bass-barCount Almaviva
Dorothea Röschmann sopCountess Almaviva
Katharina Kammerloher mezMarcellina
Otto Katzameier bass-bar.....Bartolo
Florian Hoffmann ten.....Don Basilio
Peter Maus tenDon Curzio
Sónia Grané sop.....Barbarina
Olaf Bär barAntonio

Berlin State Opera Chorus and Staatskapelle /

Gustavo Dudamel

Stage director Jürgen Flimm and Gudrun Hartmann

Video director Hannes Rossacher

Accentus (F) ② DVD ACC20366; (F) Blu-ray Disc ACC10366
(3h 8' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1,
DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Schiller Theater, Berlin,
November 2015



As the Overture plays, the main characters enter via a walkway that extends across the auditorium behind the conductor. They are struggling with luggage – trunks, suitcases, hatboxes. On the stage the staff are grouped, placards of welcome in their hands. The Almavivas have arrived for a holiday at their summer

residence by the sea, servants in tow. Susanna loses no time in applying her suncream. But it's a short holiday, because after the 'day of madness' the Almaviva party is off home, luggage and all.

Judging from the luggage, the setting is some time between the world wars. It's hard to tell more precisely from the clothes. Figaro, with slicked-back hair, wears a waistcoat and bow tie. The Countess is in baggy trousers, while the Count is variously in cricket whites, a striped blazer, and singlet and shorts; he puzzlingly calls on Susanna still wearing the helmet and goggles donned for the journey. Cherubino is in 18th-century costume: appropriate livery for a servant, perhaps, but not for a page from an aristocratic family.

This is all well and good, and the brouhaha is entertaining in its way, but the essential distinction between the classes is pretty well ignored. In particular the Count – bested by the servants, of course, but still a formidable figure – is made to look ridiculous. He collapses among the suitcases and baskets on entering; he jives in the Act 2 finale; at the end of 'Vedrò mentr'io sospiro' he cuts his hand as he crushes a wine-glass and makes a comic face of agony before running off.

Where the production goes over the top, though, is with the continual presence of characters who shouldn't be there. Sometimes they observe; sometimes they participate. During Bartolo's 'La vendetta', Susanna, the bride-to-be, witnesses Marcellina trying on her bridal veil. Barbarina sees Cherubino being dressed as a girl, and both she and Susanna watch the dangerously intimate scene with the Countess. When Figaro, supposedly alone, rails against women, Susanna is there, kissing and stroking him – to which he is oblivious. There is, in general, an awful lot of coming and going.

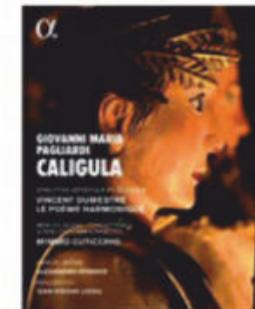
The film direction by Hannes Rossacher is good, a particularly moving instance being when the camera focuses on each happy couple in turn (including Cherubino and Barbarina) during the ensemble that follows the Countess's 'Più dolce io sono'. The recognition sextet comes after 'Dove sono': an improvement dramatically but, unfortunately, inauthentic. Marcellina's Act 4 aria is included but Don Basilio's is omitted. There are no weak links in the cast, and Gustavo Dudamel keeps things moving along nicely. This production by Jürgen Flimm and Gudrun Hartmann is not one that I care for much; but what it does, however misguided, it does well. **Richard Lawrence**

Pagliardi



Caligula

Jan Van Elsacker ten.....Caligula
Caroline Meng sop.....Cesonia
Sophie Junker sop.....Teosena
Florian Götz bar.....Artabano/Domitio
Jean-François Lombard haute-contreTigrane/Claudio
Serge Goubioud ten.....Nesbo/Gelsa
Le Poème Harmonique / Vincent Dumestre
Stage director Mimmo Cuticchio
Alpha (F) Blu-ray Disc ALPHA716 (83' • 16:9 • 1080i • stereo • 0 • s)
Includes synopsis



Giovanni Maria Pagliardi (1637-1702) composed operatic entertainments for the Medici and was *maestro di cappella* at their church, San Lorenzo in Florence. Notwithstanding his eminent career, hardly more than a few notes of his music has ever been recorded.

Caligula delirante (Venice, 1672) concerns the crazed and dangerous misbehaviour of Caligula, whose attraction to the beautiful widow Teosena (queen of Mauritania) sparks the fury of the empress Cesonia, who plots revenge by giving him a magical potion that will cause him to detest her rival. Needless to say, everything proceeds to backfire on everyone in ways that are by turns farcical and menacing. It transpires that Teosena is not quite as widowed as she had supposed – her husband Tigrane turns up alive, having survived a shipwreck only to be sold as a slave to Caligula's former foe and new ally Artabano (king of the Parthians), who also desires Teosena for himself. Caligula is driven mad by his wife's anti-love potion, banishes her to North Africa (intending her to be eaten by wild cats), declares love to the moon, and the senate is forced to intervene and depose him. However, upon being stabbed, the poison is released from his blood and he is thereby restored to sanity and life, remembers his love for the empress and approves the reunion of Teosena and Tigrane. The ironic treatment of ancient Roman folly and amorality is like a stepping stone between Monteverdi's *Poppea* (1643) and Handel's *Agric平ina* (1709).

Lasting only 80 minutes, Vincent Dumestre's adaptation of the score presumably does not present the full three-act opera preserved in Venice's Biblioteca Marciana; the booklet note says little about the opera (and misattribution Domenico Gisberti's libretto to Nicolo

Beregran), instead reminiscing about a visit to the Palermo workshop of puppeteer Mimmo Cuticchio, whose production (with Alexandra Rübner) represents the action using the traditional Sicilian craft of half-life-size wooden marionettes operated by iron rods. The crew onstage and real-life singers positioned at the sides are visible but dressed in black, their lit faces showing obvious affinity for how the drama is being portrayed; the seven-strong band of Le Poème Harmonique are seated in the foreground in a circle. The collective result is charming and clever – it must have been a beguiling experience in the flesh. There are effective set-piece numbers, such as Caligula's mad scene (sung with suppleness by the light tenor Jan Van Elsacker), Cesonia's heartbroken response to her banishment (performed emotively by Caroline Meng), and Teosena's bewildered lament for her apparently dead husband (sung with graceful limpidity by Sophie Junker); there are several doleful laments featuring chromatic twisting and finely crafted ritornellos for two violins and assorted basso continuo, but it is unrealistic to judge Pagliardi's merits on the selective evidence offered and its puppet-driven means of transmission. **David Vickers**

Puccini

'Puccini in Love'

La bohème - O soave fanciulla. **La fanciulla del West** - Minnie ... Che dolce nome!

Madama Butterfly - Viene la sera. **Manon Lescaut** - Tu, tu, amore? Tu?; Vedete? Io son fedele. **La rondine** - Nella tua casa; Paulette!

Il tabarro - Dimmi: perché gli hai chiesto; È ben altro il mio sogno! **Tosca** - Mario ... Son qui!

Aleksandra Kurzak sop Roberto Alagna tenor

Sinfonia Varsovia / Riccardo Frizza

Sony Classical F 19075 85983-2 (65' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



In his booklet note to this disc of love duets, Roberto Alagna argues that all the female characters represent different aspects of Puccini's 'perfect woman', while the tenors represent the composer himself. It's a fair proposition, but Alagna then claims that 'all his couples could be one and the same couple'. This is worrying. Even within their Parisian settings, there's a wide boulevard between Rodolfo and Mimì's innocent Christmas Eve declaration of love and the tortured, illicit affair between Giorgetta and Luigi aboard a sweaty barge on the Seine. Stringing together 10 duets from seven operas and linking them with 'stage directions' in italics strikes me as someone forcing a concept just a little bit too hard.

Alagna is here partnered by his wife, the delightful soprano Aleksandra Kurzak. It's not quite their first recorded project together – Warner recently issued Massenet's *La Navarraise* (reviewed last month) – but unites them in repertoire they wouldn't, perhaps, perform together often on stage. Kurzak sparkles in Rossini and Donizetti but is starting to take on weightier roles – Violetta, Desdemona, Alice Ford. Yet she's only sung Mimì of the Puccini heroines here (she also sings Liù), with her debut as Cio-Cio-San scheduled for Naples in May. So how does she fare?

While Kurzak doesn't have the vocal steel to wound Scarpia, her Tosca teases coyly in 'Non la sospiri, la nostra casetta'. However, she doesn't sound especially piqued that Cavaradossi has painted the Madonna with blue eyes. Her Manon Lescaut is a charmer – Kurzak can play the minx deliciously – and her Magda in *La rondine* has a nice touch of cream. She lacks the heft for Minnie and Giorgetta.

Puccini is more meat-and-drink to Alagna, whose Italianate timbre and open-hearted, open-throated sound is ideal; even Calaf, not represented here, is in his repertoire. He's on fine, robust form. Riccardo Frizza and Sinfonia Varsovia offer opulent orchestral support.

There's a certain similarity of approach to these varied characters, though, almost as if wanting to prove Alagna's 'same couple' claim. Where's the rugged bandit? Or the rootin'-tootin' saloon owner? Or the burly bargee? Characterisation is limited, although their singing is never less than lovely. *Bohème*'s 'O soave fanciulla' is ideal, though, with a beautifully floated final note from Kurzak, and they save the very best until last: a glorious *Butterfly* love duet that is both tender and ardent. **Mark Pullinger**

Rossini

Maometto II

Mert Süngü ten	Erisso
Elisa Balbo sop	Anna
Mirco Palazzi bass	Maometto
Victoria Yarovaya mez	Calbo
Patrick Kabongo Mubenga ten	Condulmiero/Selimo
Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań;	
Virtuosi Brunensis / Antonino Fogliani	
Naxos B ③ 8 660444/6 (175' • DDD)	
Includes synopsis	



Maometto II is one of Rossini's grandest operas, a tale of love and war inspired by Mehmet II's destruction of the Venetian enclave of Negroponte (Chalkida in modern Greece) in 1570. Nor is this some historically inspired period piece. Political unrest in southern Europe in 1820, the year Rossini wrote the opera for Naples' Teatro San Carlo, anticipated Greece's

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imminent war of independence with the Ottoman Turks.

Rossini twice revised the opera. First, for Venice in 1823, simplified and given a showpiece happy ending. Then, as *Le siège de Corinthe*, for Paris in 1826, by which time the Greek war had become Europe's most fashionable cause. Equipped with an even more politically pertinent French text, this faster-moving version, spectacularly staged by the Opéra, exploited the public mood in a way the 1820 Neapolitan prequel hadn't been placed to do.

The first complete recording of *Maometto II* was made by Philips in London in 1983. Indifferently conducted by Claudio Scimone, whose performing edition this was, it hasn't worn especially well, musically or technically, despite boasting what, on paper at least, was a first-rate cast headed by Samuel Ramey and June Anderson.

The work's epic reach, and the sense of a world on fire, is conveyed with greater cogency and power in the superbly conducted and finely engineered live recording which Avie made of the UK premiere of *Maometto II*, staged by Garsington Opera in summer 2013. I remember Rodney Milnes, that exemplary Rossinian, worrying that the CDs might simply be a pleasing souvenir of a performance that had excited in the moment. Not a bit of it, he concluded in *Opera*. 'This is an astounding account of the work *tout court*.' And so, indeed, it is.

The enterprising Rossini in Wildbad Festival has already given us a serviceable account of the Venice version of *Maometto II* (8 660149/51) and a more than serviceable account of *Le siège de Corinthe* (8 660329/30). Sadly, this final panel in their *Maometto* triptych is less recommendable.

It is at its best in the opera's dying fall of an end, where the heroine Anna Erisso prepares to take her own life in the catacombs of the besieged citadel. This is beautifully handled by Elisa Balbo. Earlier in the piece Garsington's Siân Davies is to be preferred, though not in this final scene.

Wildbad also has a fine Calbo, the Venetian general (a *travesti* role) who is promised in marriage to Anna. But, then, few singers of quality disappoint in Calbo's stand-alone Act 2 aria. The new set's larger problem lies with the often sketchy coloratura of the male antagonists. The Turkish tenor Mert Süngü is no match for Garsington's Paul Nilon, in the form of his life as the Venetian commander Paolo Erisso. And Mirco Palazzi, a plausible Assur in the recent Opera Rara recording of *Semiramide* (A/18), lacks the means to

cope with the virtuoso demands of the role of Maometto as originally written.

Garsington's Maometto, Darren Jeffery, acts powerfully and – thanks to David Parry's command of the music, both as a *bel canto* accompanist and as a shaper and driver of the larger drama – is better placed to husband his vocal resources. The Garsington choral work is also in a different league from that of Wildbad's often poorly disciplined Polish singers.

Both sets use Hans Schellevis's Critical Edition, with the Garsington performance tightening the slow-moving denouement with several well-judged small cuts. Handsomely cased, the Garsington set is the more expensive. But, then, it has a full text and English translation: important in an opera where Rossini takes accompanied recitative to new levels of expressive power.

Richard Osborne

Comparative versions:

Scimone (6/85) (PHIL) 475 5092PTR3; **D** 412 148-2PH3
Parry (8/14) (AVIE) AV2312

Rousseau



Le devin du village

Caroline Mutel sop.....Colette

Cyrille Dubois ten.....Colin

Frédéric Caton bar.....Soothsayer

Les Nouveaux Caractères / Sébastien d'Hépin

Château de Versailles Spectacles

(F) (CD + DVD) CVS004 (68' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Théâtre de la Reine, Versailles, July 1 & 2, 2017

Includes libretto and translation



Hard on the heels of the boy Mozart's parody, *Bastien und Bastienne* (Signum, A/18), comes the original. *The Village Soothsayer* was first staged at Fontainebleau in October 1752; the lovers were sung by Marie Fel and Pierre de Jélyotte, both of them renowned for their association with the operas of Rameau. Rousseau's little piece was revived at the Opéra a few months later, and it was regularly performed in Paris till well into the 19th century. In 1780 Marie Antoinette took the role of Colette in her new theatre in the Trianon at Versailles, and it's from that very theatre – not to be confused with the Opéra Royal – that this recording comes.

It might seem perverse for Rousseau to have composed an opera in French, given his forcefully held opinion that the French language was not suitable for opera. But *Le devin du village* is more like an intermezzo, in the vein of Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* (1733): with one exception the recitatives

are *secco*, and the arias are simple, even artless. The story is simple, too. Colin, a shepherd, has left Colette, a shepherdess, for the lady of the manor. The Soothsayer (in return for cash down, let it be said) advises Colette to pretend that she, too, has a new lover. Colin returns to heel and all is well. Their reconciliation is achieved at the halfway mark: there is then 30 minutes of rejoicing.

Given the amount of dancing, it's odd for this to be billed as a CD, with the DVD as a bonus; especially as there's a 'Pantomime', unexplained in the booklet, where a courtier, having tempted a village girl and threatened to kill her lover, in the end does the decent thing by yielding her up. The production by Jean-Jacques Schaettel, filmed by Olivier Simonnet, is straightforward. The 18th-century sets include a wooded landscape, an interior, and descending clouds. Colette wears a rust-coloured cloak and a floral dress, Colin is in coat and breeches, while the Soothsayer sports a turban with magnificent plumes.

The singers are hardly taxed by the music but they sing mellifluously and act with conviction; the 12-strong band under Sébastien d'Hépin is grace itself. The DVD isn't divided into chapters and there are no subtitles, but the booklet includes the libretto and English translation. It's all very enjoyable; but the servants in 1780, witnessing the queen pretending to be a shepherdess, must have thought that the Revolution couldn't come too soon.

Richard Lawrence

Rubinstein

Moses

Stanisław Kuflyuk bar.....Moses

Torsten Kerl ten.....Pharaoh

Evelina Dobračeva sop.....Asnath

Małgorzata Walewska mez.....Johebet

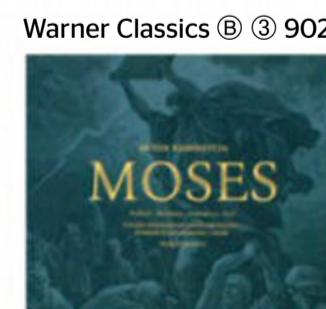
Chen Reiss sop.....Miriam

Adam Zdunikowski ten.....Job

Artos Children's Choir; Warsaw Philharmonic

Choir; Polish Sinfonia Iuventus Orchestra / Michail Jurowski

Warner Classics B ③ 9029 55864-3 (3h 18' • DDD)



Moses and the Israelites were cursed with 40 years'

wandering in the wilderness. Those who survive the three CDs of Anton Rubinstein's biblical epic may feel that the chosen people got off lightly. This was Rubinstein's great labour of love, and it took him seven years, from 1884 to 1891,



Countertenor Raffaele Pe, with mezzo Raffaella Lupinacci, give a Julius Caesar-inspired Baroque programme – see review on page 94

to write. But, saddled with a flat, wordy and extraordinarily repetitive German libretto by Salomon Hermann Mosenthal, the pianist and composer was working with duff material.

Written for a suitably huge cast of characters and a chorus who have to be Egyptians, Israelites, Moabites, heavenly voices and the spirits of hell, *Moses* also needed a powerful (or moneyed) backer. It didn't get one and was never performed in full on stage. More than 100 years on, conductor Michail Jurowski spearheaded this recording and associated concert performance, with the backing of Poland's Ministry of Culture. 'The world needs someone like Moses today', says Jurowski. Possibly, but sadly we don't need an opera like *Moses*.

Rubinstein had certainly been listening to his German Romantic classics, as the dominant metre of the opera is the gentle throb of Mendelssohn – and his pulsing, prolonged choral climaxes – with a dash of Wagner (*Lohengrin* or *Tannhäuser*) for some of the more charged or spiritual moments. This broad-brush technique is used to chart all the key moments in Moses's life, from the moment that he's found in the river as a baby to when he kills the overseer,

presides over the plagues, parts the Red Sea, is given the Ten Commandments and finally hands over the reins of power to Joshua.

Almost unerringly, however, Mosenthal and Rubinstein seem to miss the dramatic or expressive potential of these episodes in favour of stodgy call-and-response stand-offs between crowds, with different protagonists (Miriam, Aaron, the Voice of God) coming in and out of the canvas in a bid to move things on. Then everyone ends up rejoicing. Events are explained, not depicted. It is all very by-the-book (literally), foursquare and lacking spontaneity, and nothing is allowed to register on a human level. It would take Schoenberg to interrogate the complicated story of Moses – the prophet who *does*, but cannot persuade – with real ingenuity and theatrical ambiguity.

Although Rubinstein's allocation of voice parts is confusing – Moses is a baritone, Aaron is a bass, the voice of God and the Pharaoh double up as heroic tenors – Jurowski's cast are all fully committed, as is the Polish Sinfonia Iuventus Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic Choir and Artos Children's Choir. As Miriam, Chen Reiss's buttery soprano is a shaft of light in the gloom, although even her famous song

of deliverance after the parting of the Red Sea isn't melodically inspired. This rediscovered opera isn't manna from heaven; it's very thin gruel. **Neil Fisher**

Verdi

Macbeth

Roberto Frontali bar Macbeth

Anna Pirozzi sop Lady Macbeth

Marko Mimica bass-bar Banco

Vincenzo Costanzo ten Macduff

Manuel Pierattelli ten Malcolm

Federica Alfano sop Lady-in-Waiting

Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Massimo, Palermo / Gabriele Ferro

Stage director Emma Dante

Video director Matteo Ricchetti

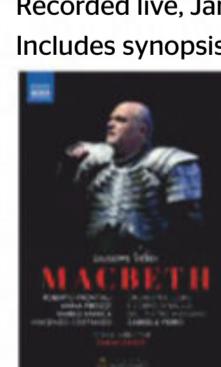
Naxos (DVD) 2 110578; (Blu-ray Disc) NBD0077V

(156' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0,

DTS-HD5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, January 26-29, 2017

Includes synopsis



A *Macbeth* cast entirely with Italians, with an Italian production team, filmed in Italy: this release has claims to

a certain authenticity. And, as with similar recent Verdi releases from Dynamic (although this appears on Naxos, it is identified as a Dynamic production), it also gives a chance to take the pulse of the Italian opera scene, and in this case of the Teatro Massimo in Palermo specifically.

The signs are not all encouraging. The orchestral playing under Gabriele Ferro starts off thin and scrappy, in the higher strings especially, and remains so throughout – things go pretty drastically off the rails in the introduction to ‘Pietà, rispetto, amore’, for example, just one moment where the quality of the playing undermines any sense of dramatic tautness. The choral singing is also weak. A quick comparison with Antonio Pappano’s Royal Opera forces in Opus Arte’s film of Phyllida Lloyd’s Covent Garden production (7/12) reveals what’s missing on both counts.

Emma Dante’s production has clearly been put together on a budget, employing minimal scenery – rickety ironwork features heavily – on an empty stage against a black background. She makes liberal use of the theatre’s corps de ballet, including raunchy rollicking to precede the witches’ scenes. The witches themselves, played by both dancers and chorus, have a pronounced penchant for Zombie-like twitching. That, and the skeletal horse on which both Macbeth and his wife make entrances, are not always easy to take entirely seriously, but it’s a show with several stylish moments. Costumes are stern with a militaristic twist.

There are some good voices in the cast. Roberto Frontali is a reliable Verdian and turns in a decent performance as Macbeth. But the voice has lost some of its juice and his acting is hardly revelatory. Anna Pirozzi is a sturdy Lady Macbeth, although it’s not a portrayal that catches fires as one would hope – she’s not helped, admittedly, by the orchestral support or by her witchy costume. Among the smaller roles, Vincenzo Costanzo makes a strong impression as a bright-voiced Macduff.

Hugo Shirley

‘Giulio Cesare’

‘A Baroque Hero’

Bianchi La morte di Cesare – Rasserenata i mesti rai; Saprò d’ogn’alma audace **Giacomelli** Cesare in Egitto – Bella tel dica amore; Il cor che sdegnato **Handel** Ariodante – Scherza infida. Giulio Cesare in Egitto – Al lampo dell’armi; Son nata a lagrimar^a; Va tacito a nascosto **Piccinni** Cesare in Egitto – Spargi omai ti dolce oblio; Tergi la belle lagrime **Pollarolo** Giulio Cesare in Egitto – Non temer!; Sdegnoso turbine

Raffaele Pe countertenor **Raffaella Lupinacci** mez La Lira di Orfeo / **Luca Giardini**
Glossa © GCD923516 (71' • DDD)
Includes texts and translations



Today Julius Caesar is all but synonymous musically with Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*. But, as countertenor Raffaele Pe here demonstrates, the composer’s opera was just the pinnacle of a fashion for Caesar-inspired dramas that swept across Italy during the late 17th and 18th centuries.

In many ways the recording is a test of history – is Handel’s all-obliterating masterwork really the only musical portrait that merits survival? Pe and collaborators Luca Giardini and La Lira di Orfeo bravely (or perhaps rashly) put Handel’s music head to head with arias by Francesco Bianchi, Niccolò Piccinni, Geminiano Giacomelli and Carlo Francesco Pollarolo.

The stylistic span is broad. Between the earliest opera, Pollarolo’s *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (1713), and the latest, Bianchi’s *La morte di Cesare* (1788), we’ve moved from crisp Baroque rhythms to melting Mozartian grace – the latter suiting the cool, patrician playing of La Lira di Orfeo noticeably better. You might be forgiven for expecting a bit more, well, warrioring in these portraits of a great statesman and military hero but it’s as a lover that we see him almost exclusively. Thank goodness for Handel’s ‘Va tacito’ and ‘Al lampo dell’armi’, where Pe can flex his coloratura muscles and give us irony and ferocity to break up all the elegant languishing.

That said, taken on their own terms, the Bianchi arias are a treat – emotion carefully folded into beautiful and elaborate melodic shapes. Piccinni’s too, especially the carefully tragic ‘Tergi le belle lagrime’, are well worth an encounter. With less to distinguish them from Handel’s masterpiece, the earlier works have less to recommend them.

I’m not sure Pe would be my first choice for any of this repertoire. His is a solid, uncomplicated voice, but lacks either the Fagioli-style technical flair or Davies-style beauty to set it apart. There are also some slightly odd choices within the programme. Why include the Cornelia/Sesto duet ‘Son nata a lagrimar’ and not any Tolomeo or Sesto arias? And what Ariodante’s glorious ‘Scherza infida’ is doing on a Caesar-inspired album is anyone’s guess.

Alexandra Coglan

‘Momento immobile’

Bellini I Capuleti e i Montecchi – Eccomi in lieta
vesta ... Oh! Quante volte. La Sonnambula – Ah!
non credea ... Ah! non giunge **Donizetti** Don
Pasquale – Quel guardo ... So anch’io. L’elisir
d’amour – Prendi; per me sei libero^a. Linda di
Chamounix – Ah! tardai troppo ... O luce di
quest’anima. Lucia di Lammermoor – Regnava
nel silenzio^a **Rossini** Guillaume Tell – Sombre
forêt. Otello – Dagli affanni oppressa ... Assisa a
piè d’un salice^b. Tancredi – Come dolce all’alma
mia

Venera Gimadieva sop

^{ab}**Natalia Brzezińska** mez ^b**Alberto Sousa** ten
Hallé Orchestra / **Gianluca Marcianò**
Rubicon © RCD1021 (75' • DDD)
Includes texts and translations



Venera Gimadieva burst on to the UK scene as Violetta in Glyndebourne’s 2014 production of *La traviata* (since issued by Opus Arte on DVD/Blu-ray, 11/15). She was glamorous, rich-voiced and beguiling, if not ultimately – for me at least – that moving as Verdi’s consumptive heroine. Here, on her debut album, we get a sense of the same virtues applied to repertoire by an early generation of Italian composers.

It’s significant, however, that the most successful performance on the disc is in Desdemona’s 20-minute scene from Rossini’s *Otello*, where, helped by sensitive support from the Hallé Orchestra and her mezzo and tenor colleagues, she is moving and noble, the voice powerful, dark-toned but with an appealing hint of edge. Even here, though, where the line remains relatively unruffled by the coloratura activity we get elsewhere through the disc, one gets a sense of Gimadieva’s shortcomings: occasional problems with intonation and a lack of polish when agility is called for.

She makes for an appealing – and appealingly steely – Giulietta on the opening track but elsewhere on the album the tuning is increasingly a problem, a beat developing higher up in the voice, where Gimadieva’s soprano can also become a little breathy and lose its sheen. She lacks agility in Amenaide’s aria from *Tancredi*, for example, becoming yelpy in the coloratura, and we find her sagging and sounding tired in Amina’s scene from *La sonnambula*, where Alberto Sousa’s unrefined interjections are less welcome. She can’t melt the heart as she should in the final minutes of Lucia’s ‘Regnava nel silenzio’, either, while her Norina is hardly big on innocent charm (and the text is missing from the booklet for half of that scene, too).



Formidable voice and artistry: Marina Rebeka launches her own label with a selection of bel canto scenes from operas by Bellini, Donizetti and Spontini

Gianluca Marcianò conducts idiomatically throughout but he can't make up for the fact that Gimadieva, clearly a fine artist, is on distinctly uneven form.
Hugo Shirley

'Spirito'

Bellini Norma - Ah! bello a me ritorna; Casta diva ... Fine al rito. Il pirata - Scena; Col sorriso d'innocenza ... Qual suono ferae; Oh! s'io potessi; Oh! Sole! Ti vela di tenebre oscure **Donizetti** Anna Bolena - Al dolce guidama ... Che mai sento; Coppia iniqua; Piangete voi? Maria Stuarda - Ah! Se un giorno da queste ritorte; Deh! Tu di un umile preghiera ... Oh colpo! Di un cor che muore ... Giunge il conte; Io vi rivedo alfin! **Spontini** La vestale - Impitoyable Dieux; Ô des infortunés; Sur cet autel sacré; Toi, que j'implore avec effroi

Marina Rebeka soprano Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Massimo, Palermo / Jader Bignamini
Prima Classic (PRIMA001) (78' • DDD)



After Mozart (Sony, 1/14) and Rossini (BR-Klassik, 1/18), the Latvian soprano

Marina Rebeka here presents a selection of meaty *bel canto* scenes on her own label, Prima Classic. It's a bold venture but one backed up by a formidable voice and plenty of artistry, not to mention musicological research: a charming picture in the booklet shows a white-gloved Rebeka, magnifying glass at hand, poring over the manuscript of *Anna Bolena* in a Milan archive.

She dives straight in at the *bel canto* deep end with a 'Casta diva' that's firm and focused, and certainly not lacking in nobility. And immediately one notices the plumpiness of the voice, placed – along with her Italian consonants – far back in the throat. This is a big, dark instrument, and one that, as I noted when reviewing her Rossini, seems to nudge into the *lirico-spinto* category. It's sturdy and rich across the range and has a formidable top, but also a certain weight that needs to be steered around tight coloratura corners.

As before, Rebeka scores big points for the nobility and *grandezza* of her performances; she's at her best when called on to convey determination and steely strength. Her scene from *Maria Stuarda* is terrific, then, the prayer

building up impressively and movingly. She reacts well to the more stately dramaturgy of *La vestale*'s finale scene, too. And the artistry on display in the *Anna Bolena* excerpt is moving on its own terms.

It's when it comes to really tugging the heartstrings that I find myself wishing for a little more variety; and Rebeka doesn't always let the flesh-and-blood characters behind the impeccably turned notes shine through. A quick comparison with Montserrat Caballé's account of the *Pirata* scene or Joyce DiDonato in the *Maria Stuarda* preghiera (on her 'Stella di Napoli' album – Erato, 11/14) shows what a more flexible voice and interpretative approach can bring.

She gets idiomatic support from Jader Bignamini, although the forces of the Teatro Massimo di Palermo are a little scrappy, as well as a quartet of further singers, whose names are tucked away deep in the booklet.
Hugo Shirley

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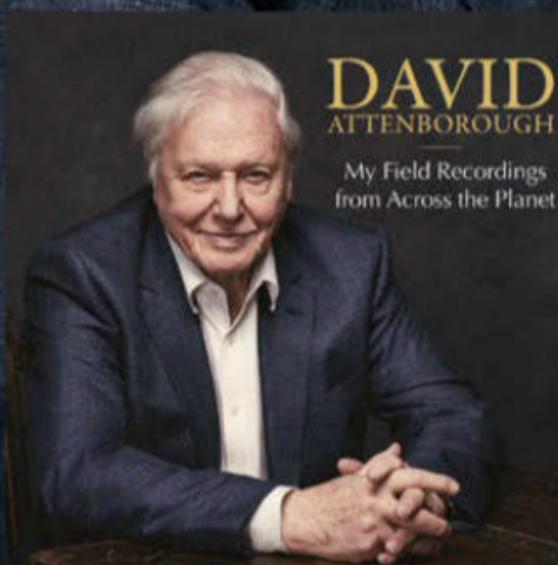
*“While I was theoretically looking for pythons,
in the evenings I would record different types of music...”*

David Attenborough reflects on his time filming *Zoo Quest* between 1954-1963

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

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THE WORLD MUSIC COLLECTOR

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Ingrid Laubrock

Contemporary Chaos Practices

Intakt Ⓛ CD314



Premiered at Germany's Moers festival in 2017, Ingrid Laubrock assembles a near 50-piece ensemble including improvising soloists to perform two original works: a four-part suite 'Contemporary Chaos Practices' and a piece entitled 'Vogelfrei'. Though idiomatically it's closest to abstract contemporary classical music, this is a work of sensual rather than cerebral qualities, with Laubrock's improvisatory sensibilities merging with composition in a way that creates an organically pulsating narrative to the music. The title-track suite is a remarkably detailed soundscape full of otherworldly and way-out pleasures. It's perfectly integrated with

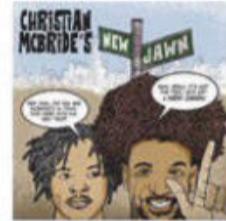
the inventive Mary Halvorson's eerily warped guitar solos and Laubrock's playful sax contortions. 'Vogelfrei' revolves at first around a Ligeti-ish drone shimmering with overtones upon which emerge ghostly gestures from the pianist Kris Davis and a choir. There's an intriguing climax that imagines a collaboration between Olivier Messiaen and Lalo Schifrin. It's mesmerising for the most part and an impressive first-time accomplishment.

Selwyn Harris

Christian McBride's New Jawn

Christian McBride's New Jawn

Mack Avenue Ⓛ MAC 1133



This is McBride's new quartet, 'Jawn' apparently Philadelphia slang for 'joint', so make of that what you will. Semantics

aside, it's a feisty group, with the leader's succulent basslines at its centre, Nasheet Waits offering a gritty rhythmic counterpoint as the frontliners ebb and flow. Marcus Strickland is a known entity these days, always a resourceful improviser, and clearly relishes the chance, as on his own 'The Middle Man', to battle it out with Waits, before Josh Evans, a new name to me, comes in with his brittle attack and Cherry-like fervency. Indeed, McBride's opening 'Walkin' Funny' is about as wilfully Ornette-like as you'll get with its see-saw shape and some pretty wild playing from the band. Each man contributes originals to the album, with Evans at his most lyrical on his 'Ballad of Ernie Washington'. Highly varied, often fragmentary, yet capable of surprises, this is a group clearly used to thinking on its feet: nothing anodyne or routine here, with Evans a talent to watch. **Peter Vacher**

World Music

Jeremy Dutcher

Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa

Jeremy Dutcher/Fontana North Ⓛ



When Jeremy Dutcher received the Polaris Prize (the Canadian equivalent of the Mercury Prize) for this album in September, he first thanked Maggie Paul, an elder from his community who sent him on a quest that became a transformative experience and gave birth to this very album. *Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa* (Our Maliseets Songs) involves the rearrangement of 110-year-old recordings from his community that were kept on wax cylinders at the Canadian National Museum of History.

While Dutcher is a classically trained operatic tenor, composer and musicologist, he also blends his Wolastoq First Nation roots into his music. At the museum, he

listened deeply to the recordings and wrote harmonic and melodic lines around the voices recorded by an anthropologist in 1911, creating a new sound that intertwines between classical, traditional and electronic. The result is stunning and the inclusion of the ancient voices within the music buckle up the circle of time.

Marc Fournier

Jodelfisch

Neue Gezeiten

Beste! Unterhaltung Ⓛ BU080



What an inspired blend of instruments Jodelfisch have alighted upon, variously a mix of harp, accordion, clarinet, tuba or cornet, ukulele and hackbrett (German hammered dulcimer). Wielded by the Munich-based quartet, together with some

rapturous vocals both individually and together in close harmony, it all makes for an album that is nothing short of gorgeous.

There are many moods and stylistic sleights of hand on *Neue Gezeiten* (New Tides). One moment Jodelfisch are Renaissance troubadours ('Hoch Auf Jenem Berg'), the next hipsterishly modern ('Wedding on Rhodos'). It's joyful music-making and Europe-wide in its musical influences, with German language and Bavarian dance, Balkan spirit and Scandinavian character. The quartet's personnel is diverse too. Alongside his German bandmates Sabrina Walter, Sandra Hollstein and Vreni Hieber, Gudran Thomas makes the ensemble a quarter English. There is an outstanding vocal performance on wispy English ballad 'Maid in Bedlam', though it is not clear which of the three is singing. Nevertheless, three cheers for Jodelfisch. **Tim Woodall**

Songlines

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Pioneering Mahler from Bavaria

Peter Quantrill welcomes back Rafael Kubelík's Munich Mahler cycle from the 1970s

A reminder or two may come in handy. At the time of its complete release late in 1971, this was the first Mahler cycle recorded by a single ensemble (pipping Philips, Haitink and the Concertgebouw to the post by a couple of months). All bar the Eighth were made in the same hall – the Herkules-Saal in Munich, still the city's optimal concert acoustic – and in conjunction with live performances, according to the conditions laid down by its conductor. 'I like to have an audience,' said Rafael Kubelík at the time. 'Besides, there has been plenty of chance then to rehearse it fully. Once in the studio, I like to go straight through the work. Then we make a second take and this is usually the right one.'

One more reminder. Kubelík had left his homeland two decades before making these recordings. The Czechness of his Mahler can be over-stated. He was conducting a predominantly home-grown and -trained Bavarian orchestra. In both solo and tutti, the Munich brass is very German indeed – no bad thing in the apotheoses of the Second and Third or the often-frenetic welter of the 'middle' symphonies Nos 5–7.

In February 1967, Kubelík began the cycle with the Ninth – as Daniel Harding and Claus Peter Flor have recently done. It's a move open to question. In 1975, he gave the Ninth on tour with the BRSO in Tokyo, a performance issued by Audite that is much more 'bedded in' to the idiom and technically proficient while working within the formal parameters established eight years earlier. From later in 1967, the First brings noticeable improvements in accuracy, immediacy and ensemble over both the Ninth and previous documented Firsts directed by Kubelík in Rome and Vienna.

Consistency, then, is a given, in this most multifarious of canonical symphonic cycles, and was prized as a virtue from the first reviews onwards. With it came concomitant reservations, set against

the more extrovert demonstrations of how this music could sound in the hands of Bernstein and Solti, over a comparatively plain-speaking or even understated approach to the most ambitious, least classically symphonic chapters. Yet such reservations have dated. When now the Second is routinely wheeled out as a *Bühnenweihfestinfonie* for occasions when even Beethoven's Ninth just ain't big enough and accorded the laboured reverence of a secular rite, Kubelík's piece of spiritual theatre offers a welcome and refreshing corrective.

Slow movements often tell their stories with unforced inwardness

Yes, for all-engulfing uplift, Bernstein and Tennstedt are still your men, here and in the Eighth. Yet set Kubelík alongside today's most searching and open-minded Mahler interpreters, least in hock to the traditions Mahler himself deplored (the likes of Nott, Roth and Stenz), and he appears as a man before his time. Irony doesn't raise its ugly head in the tricky central scherzos in Nos 2, 3, 5 and 7, yet there isn't a dull or blank bar in them. Kubelík's much-vaunted fleet tempos permit daring, not always score-based flexibility in the journey-finales of Nos 2 and 6. Just occasionally – not only the Ninth but the second Nachtmusik of the Seventh – a rhythmically casual or commonplace tone obtrudes, but slow movements more often tell their stories with unforced inwardness and concentration. Graced by Fischer-Dieskau's Pater ecstaticus and some of the classiest choral singing on record, the Eighth is still the pick of the set, hardly as refined in detail as Solti but more cogently knit together.

DG's latest reissue duplicates the arrangement of the symphonies in the

'Collectors Edition' from 2000, with the *Adagio* of the Tenth tucked in after the finale of the Third (which has been unmusically separated from the preceding vocal movements). Part 2 of the Eighth is still crudely divided into a pair of LP-length tracks. Pedants will continue to chafe at the 'Titan' soubriquet being applied to the four-movement final version of the First in the accompanying booklet, which contains sung texts, translations and condensed essays by Karl Schumann and Constantin Floros, but gives nothing away about remastering dates, either for the CDs or the accompanying Blu-ray audio disc. Were Audite to box up the conductor's risk-and-reward live Mahler, *Das Lied* with Baker included, this mainstay of the DG catalogue would show its age. For now, it remains a worthy testimony of an allegiance felt no less deeply than Bernstein's 'special relationship' with Mahler. According to Kubelík in 1971, 'Mahler is the composer who, at least for me, has perhaps the strongest heart of all composers. He has the courage to say everything which the others perhaps dare only in idealistic form. Beethoven had this courage, and Mahler has it, too.' **G**



THE RECORDING

Mahler 10 Symphonies

Bavarian RSO / Rafael Kubelík
DG S 10 + 483 5656

The extraordinary Oscar Levant

Jeremy Nicholas on a superb pianist who deserves to be counted among the greats

Oscar Levant (1906–72), for those unfamiliar with his name, was – as billed on the front cover of this exceptional release – ‘Pianist, Composer, Author, Comedian and Hollywood Star’. He was all these things as well as a songwriter, radio and TV host, and quiz-show panellist. As he said himself, ‘What the world needs is more geniuses with humility, there are so few of us left’. He was also a drug addict, self-destructive, mentally unstable and, frequently, a pain in the arse. It was said of him that every time a pearl came out of his mouth, a pill went in.

His complete piano recordings are gathered together here for the first time. Most of them have been unobtainable for years; many are appearing on CD for the first time; the Bach Partita No 1 arranged by Harold Samuel has never been released before. But paradoxically, though it certainly has the wow factor as far as looks are concerned, because of the expensive packaging fewer people will perhaps hear these recordings than if they had been issued in the standard-size CD box-set.

The same size as an LP and nearly an inch thick, the eight CDs of recordings made between 1942 and 1958 come attached to the endpapers of a hard-back coffee-table book that weighs a ton. The 124 pages are printed on top-quality photographic paper and contain a brief essay (in English and German) about Levant. Nearly half of this, after a scrapbook of Levant in music and movies and detailed track listings, is taken up with crisp facsimiles of Levant session reports. Only the most obsessive pianophiles (a small market) will be interested in these, while the average customer who just wants to have the eight CDs may be deterred by the expense (about £55). And collectors will not thank Sony Classical for a box that will not fit into their CD shelving!

The raison d'être for this set is to celebrate Levant the pianist. Anything else is irrelevant. And Levant, until his final years, was a very good pianist indeed. For confirmation, and to get an immediate flavour of Levant's welcome individuality, all you have to do is begin at the beginning with disc 1: Gershwin's Piano Concerto. For anyone learning the work or wishing to know ‘how it should go’, Levant's recording is a library essential and, for this listener, the benchmark that emphasises its jazz age origins. (You can see Levant playing the last movement



Oscar Levant: a peerless Gershwin pianist but a fine interpreter in a huge variety of music

as featured in the movie *An American in Paris* on YouTube.) The Concerto is followed by Gershwin's three other piano-and-orchestra works in definitive performances, newly remastered with more depth and crispness than before. Levant and Gershwin enjoyed a competitive love-hate relationship, but there have been few better interpreters of Gershwin's music than Levant.

He is pretty close to top drawer in the other piano concertos in the set, with an angular precision that is quite distinctive, emphasised by the forward placing of the piano in a slightly airless acoustic. The Tchaikovsky and Grieg concertos – both given fiery and far from humdrum readings under Eugene Ormandy and Efrem Kurtz respectively – are topped off with the rather less-familiar Concertino of Honegger conducted by Fritz Reiner no less. Is a picture emerging? Levant, despite the quips, the levity and the film career, was always regarded by his peers as a seriously good pianist. This is reinforced by an absolutely fizzing account of the Khachaturian Concerto, its vulgar excesses and excessive brutality seized with relish. William Kapell's more famous recording sounds restrained by comparison. The same imperious drive and command inform Levant's assault on Rubinstein's once-popular Fourth Concerto. The first movement's peroration is delivered with delirious abandon, but you can hear that Levant has not quite the technical finesse of Hofmann, Ponti, Ginzburg or the extraordinary Marc-André Hamelin.

Both works are conducted peerlessly by Dimitri Mitropoulos.

The solo recordings are a mixed bag, those from the 1940s and early '50s generally the more successful. On disc 2, for instance, Levant responds particularly well to modern works with quirky harmonies and rhythms (Gershwin's Three Preludes, the Toccata and Nocturne by the obscure Valery Zhelbinsky, his own brief Sonatina and Shostakovich's Polka from *The Age of Gold*, the latter far wittier and more playful here in 1941 than the later 1958 performance on disc 8). On disc 7 there is a clutch of Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsodies* where, occasionally, as in the Rubinstein concerto, Levant's good intentions are hampered by some technical and textual approximations. Ravel's *Pavane* is horribly pulled about, yet it is followed by a tender and relatively straightforward account of Mompou's *Scènes d'enfants* which is perfectly delightful. Disc 8 has some Chopin (best avoided) and other short works by Debussy, Prokofiev and others in tight, restricted sound.

In sum, it's wonderful to have all of Levant's recordings made available. Now Sony Classical should consider issuing them in an alternative (cheaper) conventional box-set format and let Levant, in this instance, be treated like any other distinguished concert pianist of the past. **G**

THE RECORDING

'A Rhapsody in Blue' The extraordinary life of Oscar Levant
Sony Classical 88985 47186-2

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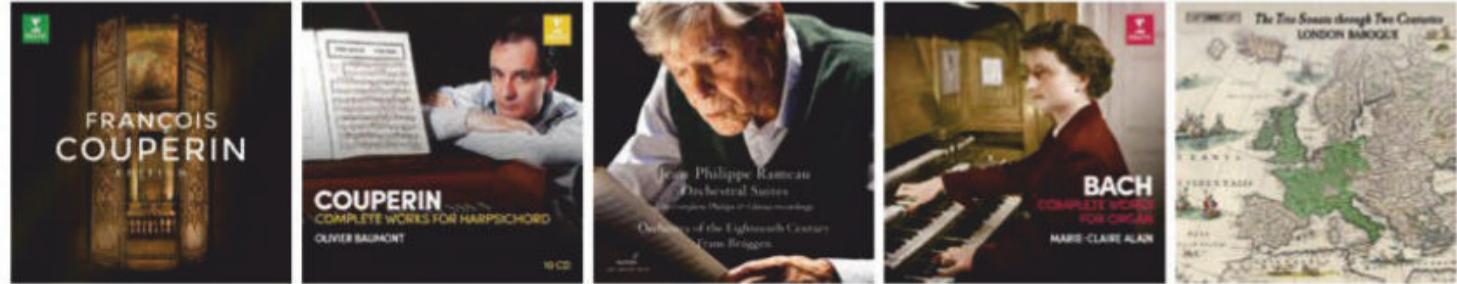
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BOX-SET Round-up

Rob Cowan offers a personal round-up of some worthwhile CD bargains

Erato's 16-disc **François Couperin Edition** contains a wealth of quality performances, the latest from 1996, the three *Leçons de ténèbres* under William Christie and a Christoph Rousset disc of motets with soloists including Sandrine Piau and members of Les Talens Lyriques, the *Motet de sainte Suzanne* being quite glorious. A 1988 programme of *L'apothéose de Lully*, *L'apothéose de Corelli* and *Concert dans le goût théâtral* finds Sir John Eliot Gardiner a commanding presence but for me the real revelation was Lionel Rogg's 1970 recordings of the Organ Masses (on a Silbermann organ, 1710/Kern-Mühleisen, 1955). Quite aside from the sheer variety of the music, the playing is magnificent: try, by way of an example, the 'Offertoire' from the *Messe pour les Paroisses* (disc 6, track 15). Among other highlights is the delightful series of instrumental suites *Les nations* featuring an augmented Quadro Amsterdam, pioneering period performances that nonetheless admit enough vibrato and expressive nuancing into their playing to sound like a relatively modern chamber group. The heart of the enterprise has to be Laurence Boulay's memorable 1970s recordings of the harpsichord works, crisply articulated and closely recorded. An archive 'bonus' disc includes performances by the pianists Marcelle Meyer (superb), Georges Cziffra (a bit clattery) and other artists, but unaccountably no Wanda Landowska, whose pre-war recording of the magisterial *Passacaille* – part of a whole Couperin sequence – is a true classic.

Also from Erato comes **Olivier Baumont's** early 1990s set of the harpsichord works, the sound far warmer than on Boulay's recordings (both sets call on a variety of instruments), Baumont's approach more concerned with elegance and the grand gesture than a vivid sense of rhythm, though he too can claim rhythm among his virtues. Both players keep a sense of musical line paramount and make light of the music's many ornaments, an issue that in less skilled hands can seem as if the wood is obscuring the trees. In a field that also includes the likes of Kenneth Gilbert, Gustav Leonhardt and Christoph Rousset (though not



always in complete sets), these fine performances certainly hold their own.

Wonderful to see **Frans Brüggen's** Philips and Glossa recordings with the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century of Orchestral Suites by Rameau reappear as a Glossa 'The Grand Tour' collection. No one in my experience makes more out of this vivid music than Brüggen did, a fact that the swirling Overture to *Les Boréades* makes clear. Try also the wild 'Contredanse en rondeau' or the gaily swinging, richly textured 'Air vif'. If ever performances justified period performance, these are they. And there's the excited Overture to *Naïs* with its pounding timpani, the Overture to *Zoroastre* too. Eight suites in all are represented and the recordings are exceptionally vivid. Even if you don't think you're up for Baroque repertoire, do give this wonderful set a try. You won't regret it, I promise you.

Even if you don't think you're up for Baroque repertoire, do give this wonderful set a try

Another peach of a bargain is **Marie-Claire Alain's** first set of Bach organ works (she made three in all), recorded for Erato in the 1960s. Out of interest I sampled one of my favourite Preludes and Fugues, the one in C, BWV547, in all three versions, the earliest, swift and propulsive, the second, recorded around 1980, broader, more along the lines of, say, Walcha, the third, from 1985, marginally broader still, and with an upward shift in pitch. The trio sonatas are also favourites, and comparing the First in the three versions, it's the middle version that's the most colourful, although the 1960s recording has plenty of vitality, whereas the most recent option is more recessed and therefore less immediate. Of course differing venues and instruments are

crucial but in general the earliest set is a joy to listen to. I would tend towards it in the first instance, with its immediate predecessor coming a very close second.

Speaking of trio sonatas, BIS's collection of **The Trio Sonata through Two Centuries** calls on the considerable talents of London Baroque to trace the genre's history from Orlando Gibbons in the early 17th century to Tartini, who died towards the close of the 18th century. Midstream there are numerous composers whose work deserves close scrutiny, some of them well known, or at least relatively familiar (Locke, Blow, Purcell, Handel, Avison, Boyce, Arne, Lully, Louis and François Couperin, Marais, Schmelzer, Buxtehude, Biber, Rebel, JC Bach, Telemann, CPE Bach, Albinoni, Vivaldi, Vitali, etc), others rather less well known (Abel, Erskine, Geoffroy, Le Roux, Dollé, Guignon, Vierdanck, à Kempis, Becker, Rosenmüller, Weckmann, Kerll, Cima, Turini, Buonamente, Castello, Uccellini, Falconiero, Cazzati, Marini, Pestolozza, Gallo, etc). The instruments involved include violin, viola, bass viol, cello, harpsichord and chamber organ, so in addition to the considerable musical variety there's a great deal of instrumental colour on offer too. The recordings are up to BIS's usual high standard. Ⓛ

THE RECORDINGS

'François Couperin Edition'

Erato S 16 9029 56111-6

F Couperin Complete Works for Harpsichord

Olivier Baumont hpd

Erato S 10 9029 56345-5

Rameau Orchestral Suites

Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century / Frans Brüggen

Glossa M 4 GCD921125

JS Bach Complete Works for Organ

Marie-Claire Alain org

Warner Classics S 15 9029 56345-3

'The Trio Sonata Through Two Centuries'

London Baroque

BIS M 8 BIS9050

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



A grand tradition

I'm hoping that before too long SWR will release a box of Hans Rosbaud's Mahler broadcasts (those that I've heard are exceptional), but in the meantime, Documents (Intense Media) has granted us a set of **Hermann Scherchen**'s Mahler, which like Rosbaud's dispenses with sighs and tears for the sake of raw energy and cerebral awareness. Best of all are the various broadcasts with the Vienna Symphony, including the Eighth Symphony (1951), which is dimly recorded, the sound frame plummy and vague, but which in terms of performance is both broad and cumulatively exultant. As with so many historical broadcast recordings, you need to listen *through* the sound rather than *to* it, but I'd recommend making the effort.

The Ninth Symphony (1950) is at times a dead ringer for Bruno Walter's pre-Anschluss 1938 Vienna Philharmonic account, similarly ferocious in the first movement, *gemütlich* in the second, sardonic in the third and burningly intense in the finale. The Vienna Symphony's playing occasionally veers towards untidiness (they're clearly making up for lost time), but the spirit is absolutely right – this could easily have been the work's premiere, at least as I'd imagine it to have sounded. The Seventh (1950) also has a feeling of elemental engagement about it, with all the vigour and momentary imperfections of raging elements, the Scherzo dark and sinewy, the two 'night music' movements filled with their own unique atmosphere. A further 1950 Vienna Symphony production is the opening *Adagio* from the 10th Symphony, a performance that suggests an eerie, even nightmarish, sense of calm as well as searing pain. Scherchen's grasp of the structure of the symphony (and, more generally, of all the symphonies) commands respect. There are Leipzig RSO recordings of the Third and Sixth Symphonies (both from 1960), the latter swift beyond the norm (the first movement is positively hectic), the former featuring an especially moving account of the central 'O Mensch! Gib acht!', where the alto is Soňa Červená and the violin solo

is beautifully played. Again, if you're after executant perfection, you'll be disappointed: these live performances often sound more like inspired rehearsals than finished concerts with the i's dotted and t's crossed. Versions of Symphonies Nos 1, 2 and 5 (with a memorably wild second movement) and the shorter song-cycles (*Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and *Kindertotenlieder*, featuring mezzo Lucretia West) are Westminster recordings, the *Resurrection* alone presented in stereo. There is no version of the Fourth Symphony included, and no notes apart from the briefest biography on the back of the box. Still, this set is most definitely worth having, warts and all.

Serkin levels with perfection as closely as any pianist could manage

Like Scherchen at his best, **Jascha Horenstein** habitually put rage before beauty, at least when the musical moment was right. A recent Pristine Audio CD of French radio broadcasts scores highest in the last movement of Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, a live recording from 1961 with the French National Orchestra, captured in very respectable stereo. The tempo is daringly fast, and although the strings at the beginning kick up so much dust that detail gets lost in the haze, the movement's impact certainly hits home. The rest of the performance is good if hardly 'pristine'. The same disc includes a version of Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements* from the same concert which, alas, hardly sounds as if the same conductor is at the helm, the opening approximating in its effect an overweight drunk limping home after a night on the tiles, the third movement depressingly underpowered. The CD opens with Mihalovici's neoclassical *Sinfonia Partita* for string orchestra, an arresting piece very well performed, with Horenstein conducting the RTF National Orchestra in 1953. It's a mono recording, but Andrew Rose's

remastering is so good you'd hardly notice the shift to single channel.

Scarcely less impressive is a 1936 broadcast from Queen's Hall, London, of Schumann's Piano Concerto featuring **Rudolf Serkin** with the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Julius Harrison – an interpretation forged in the manner of Beethoven by a great Beethoven pianist. This is unfussy playing, very direct, as was Serkin's wont, but dignified in an especially poetic way. Also on the disc is a commercial HMV recording of Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata (also 1936), in which, as I hear it, Serkin levels with perfection as closely as any pianist could manage. The touch, fearsome attack, judicious choice of tempos, control of dynamics and, at the centre of the work, an uncanny feeling of poise, not to mention Serkin's famously acute sense of harmonic structure, together make for a performance in a million, even bearing in mind Serkin's other recordings of the same work. And to complete the deal, there's an incomplete live recording of Busoni's Second Violin Sonata in which Serkin partners Adolf Busch, his father-in-law, in a reading that claims both grandeur and volatility among its principle virtues. This is a truly great programme.

As it happens, Joseph Szigeti also made a wonderful recording of the Busoni (Sony, with Horszowski), but in terms of recent releases, Szigeti's 1937 recording of Brahms's Third Sonata, in which he's partnered by the great **Egon Petri**, revisits a benchmark that I cannot imagine will ever be matched, on account of not only Szigeti's eloquent phrasing and warmly cushioned tone, but also Petri's patrician command of the keyboard part. The D minor Violin Sonata is followed by the F minor Viola Sonata, where Petri partners Samuel Lifschey, a fine player who squeezes the maximum of expression out of each note and is well suited to his pianist. The disc is completed with authoritative performances of various solo piano works, including the two Op 79 Rhapsodies and the three Op 117 Intermezzos. This is another marvellous CD.

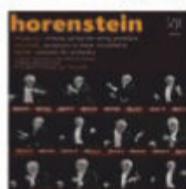


Hermann Scherchen (1891-1966) - whose Mahler is all raw energy and cerebral awareness, rather than sighs and tears

THE RECORDINGS



Mahler Symphonies etc
Vienna State Op Orch; RPO /
Scherchen et al
Documents ⑩ 600452



Bartók, Mihalovici, Stravinsky
RTF National Orchestra; French
National Orchestra / Horenstein
Pristine Audio ⑫ PASC535



**Rudolf Serkin: Early &
Unpublished Recordings** G
Serkin pf Busch vn LPO et al
Pristine Audio ⑫ PAKMO77



Brahms Sonatas etc
Szigeti vn Lifschey va Petri pf
Pristine Audio ⑫ PAKMO76

Munch in Paris

Perhaps the most memorable recording of Bloch's Violin Concerto is Szigeti's one from 1939 with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra under Charles Munch (though there are also excellent live versions from the same year under Mengelberg and Beecham). Szigeti caresses the work's gentler moments like no one else, and the latest transfer from Warner Classics, which arrives in the context of their excellent set devoted to Munch's complete recordings for the label, is as clean as a whistle, marginally cleaner in fact than the one included in Documents' Szigeti set. Other highlights are sweet-toned performances of Vivaldi, Mozart and Fauré by violinist

PHOTOGRAPH: BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Denise Soriano; Honegger's *La danse des morts*, with baritone Charles Panzéra on especially expressive form; and appealing works by Honegger, Samazeuilh, Jolivet (with baritone Pierre Bernac), Ernesto Halffter, Delannoy and Aubert, including his orchestration of an adaptation by Émile Vuillermoz of various works by Chopin – not the usual suspects by any means, in terms of repertoire. Among the interesting artists featured is the Russian pianist Kostia Konstantinov, who during the German occupation, when he was conductor of the Paris Orchestra, came under the suspicion of the German authorities, who realised he was Jewish. A rare application was made for him to be excused from wearing the yellow star, and he had to go into hiding. Also of note is Jacques Février angrily goose-stepping through the furious centre of Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand during the occupation, and Cortot's pre-war version of the same. Among Munch's later recordings are superb versions with the Paris Orchestra of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (with Jean-Claude Malgoire on cor anglais, and generally superior to Munch's wartime version of the same work, also included) and Brahms's First Symphony, and piledriving Roussel symphonies with the Lamoureux Concerts Orchestra. There's so much else besides, all utterly compelling, and presented in generally excellent transfers.

THE RECORDING



**'Charles Munch: The
Complete Recordings on
Warner Classics'**
Warner Classics ⑬ 9029 561198-9

Rosbaud in Mozart

SWR Classics' latest box of broadcast recordings featuring the Südwestfunk Orchestra Baden-Baden under Hans Rosbaud is devoted entirely to works by Mozart, a few of the recordings having previously appeared, but most of them first-time releases, at least in the UK. The trawl of piano concertos includes a memorably sensitive *Jeunehomme* with Maria Bergmann, the central *Andantino* being a high point; and No 17, which Géza Anda invests with a customary sense of keyboard colour. Friedrich Gulda shapes Nos 14 and 23 with a classicist's sensibility, and an alternative version of the latter with Robert Casadesus as soloist is typically assertive. Monique Haas is sympathetically disposed towards No 21, though her playing is comparatively mild-mannered. Dennis Brain is nigh on immaculate in the Second and Third Horn Concertos (the excellent Domenico Ceccarossi offers an alternative version of the Second), and there are satisfying versions of the concertos for bassoon (Helmut Müller), oboe (Horst Schneider) and flute and harp (Ernst Bodensohn, Annemarie Schmeisser). The Sinfonia concertante (Ludwig Bus, violin; Ulrich Koch, viola) benefits from Rosbaud's sense of musical balance, but the Notturno, although well performed, sounds conspicuously weird in rather constricted mono sound (I couldn't help imagining 'Hans Rosbaud and his incredible disappearing orchestra'). There are also well-proportioned readings of three serenades, including K361 (featuring much keenly pointed detail); four symphonies (including two very similar versions of No 40), all imbued with a sense of harmonic architecture; and a beautifully sung group of concert arias with Suzanne Danco, Helmut Krebs and Kim Borg. The mono sound is, in general, acceptable throughout, and although I'd hesitate to count this among the most revelatory of SWR Classic's Rosbaud albums (so far the Wagner, Haydn and Bruckner sets yield rather more in that respect), its consistent underlining of superior musical judgement makes it, in my view, a very desirable acquisition. As I said above, I'm hoping that a set of Rosbaud's SWR Mahler recordings – and there are quite a few of them – is lurking somewhere in the pipeline.

THE RECORDING



Mozart Concertos, symphonies
and serenades
Rosbaud et al
SWR Classic ⑨ SWR19066CD

Classics RECONSIDERED



Puccini

Tosca

Maria Callas *Tosca* Giuseppe di Stefano Cavaradossi

Tito Gobbi *Scarpia*; Chor and Orch of La Scala, Milan /

Victor de Sabata Warner Classics (ex-EMI)

The recording of the orchestra here is sharper and clearer and fuller than it was in the excellent Decca set (11/52), and de Sabata makes the music sound even more dramatic than Erede did. The balance in the Cantata is again poor (is it not possible for Tosca's voice to dominate the ensemble here?) but the engineering of the big choral finale to Act I is better done than in the Decca set,



Mark Pullinger and
Neil Fisher revisit

Maria Callas's 1953 *Tosca*, supported by di Stefano and Gobbi and accompanied by de Sabata's La Scala forces



and as good as can be hoped for. Comparing the casts, Stefano has a more resonant voice than Campora and makes the most of it. He could have characterised the part more vividly, and in this respect Campora has the better of him. Gobbi is easily the best of the three Scarpas we have had (HMV, Decca and this set), and in spite of a lack of power at the top of his voice, which is an undeniable handicap in the *Te Deum* and the final moment of his advances to Tosca in Act 2, 'Già mi struggea', he does make one feel the evil nature and slimy piety of the man. Callas, strangely enough, shows little of the

dramatic force of Tebaldi's vocal acting which made one's blood run cold at the moment she stabbed Scarpia, and her 'Vissi d'arte' does not compare well with Tebaldi's for beauty of tone and perfection of control. At the same time she gives us some lovely singing in the first act and has her moments of drama in the other two, but it is not the great performance I expected. One reason for dissatisfaction is the difficulty the engineers have in coping with her loud high notes. It is more than possible that Madame Callas's *Tosca* is more effective on the stage than on discs. **Alec Robertson (12/53)**

Mark Pullinger Neil, was this your first *Tosca* on disc? It was certainly mine – one of the earliest boxed LP opera sets I purchased.

Neil Fisher Actually, no. I had a very glamorous, very 1980s box-set with Katia Ricciarelli, a big wig, a very low-cut Empire-line dress and a lot of candles. This was another of Herbert von Karajan's attempts to launch his own *Traumpaar* of Ricciarelli and Carreras in repertoire to which they were probably unsuited.

MP Oh, I well remember that cover from the glossy DG catalogues! But being a disciple of the Penguin record guide, I believed that the Callas-de Sabata set was the *Tosca* I ought to own ... In fact, it has been touted as *the* opera recording of all time. Therefore, Alec Robertson's review is quite surprising, isn't it?

NF Indeed. One wonders what Victor de Sabata would have made of it: he probably wanted to hurl him off the

Castel Sant'Angelo personally. This is the recording where, according to Tito Gobbi's daughter Cecilia, the *Te Deum* was repeated 48 times. Admittedly, Robertson does say the section is 'as good as can be hoped for', but otherwise he's really not that enraptured. And it seems to come down to Callas. Perhaps, after decades of mythologising Callas, it's right to reassess whether her *Tosca* really is the bee's knees?

MP Well this might sting, but I've never really been a fan of Callas's voice. It was not what I consider a beautiful instrument; her voice production was uneven and it bulged in places – sometimes hollow, sometimes shrill, often frayed.

NF *Vergogna!* But, yes, even in 1953 before the wobble got really intrusive and the voice production really started to fray, Callas is Callas: there are plenty of raw moments. I can't imagine hiring this Floria Tosca to sing a delicate cantata at the Vatican ...

the *Gramophone* critic really goes for the jugular, though, when he brings up the Greek soprano's great rival, Renata Tebaldi. Must we choose?

MP In terms of voice alone, I worship at the shrine of Tebaldi. Robertson is right that Callas's 'Vissi d'arte' cannot begin to compare with Tebaldi's in terms of vocal beauty, but his assertion that Callas is dramatically weaker is quite a (shabby little) shocker. Surely it's her dramatic qualities that make Callas's *Tosca* so utterly compelling?

NF Everyone in this recording is a living, breathing person – it's the achievement of de Sabata and his producers to create a dramatic space that is so impressive. While I share your reservations about Callas's voice (I think her artistry was far better demonstrated by what she brought to the *bel canto* repertoire), there's just a sense of living theatre here, both in Callas's moody trysts with di Stefano's Cavaradossi, and in her explosive encounters with Scarpia. You can almost smell the greasepaint.



The famous *Tosca* set in the making: Maria Callas, producer Walter Legge and Victor de Sabata in 1953

MP De Sabata's contribution cannot be underestimated. His grip on the drama is magnetic; and has there been a lovelier Roman dawn? What is astonishing is that before this recording was made (across 10 days in August 1953), Callas had yet to sing *Tosca* opposite Tito Gobbi's Scarpia. In fact, they didn't sing these roles together on stage until that famous run of performances at Covent Garden in 1964, by which time this recording had already reached legendary status.

NF Yes, and that filmed Act 2 from the Royal Opera House *Tosca* – the only piece of footage of Callas on the opera stage – no doubt contributed to the mystique about the energy the two artists generated.

MP Sparks fly from their very first encounter: the ingratiating way he offers her holy water, then rouses her suspicion when he produces the Attavanti fan; Callas's guttural 'Presago sospetto!' and Gobbi's self-satisfied chuckle on 'Ho sortito l'effetto!' ... She's already swallowed the bait and he just has to reel her in. Their Act 2 is epic, Gobbi's Scarpia almost toying with his prey. Vocally, what do you make of him?

NF I find it odd that Robertson chooses to criticise the top of Gobbi's voice. For me his shortcomings are at the other end of the register, because he was a true baritone, not a bass-baritone à la Raimondi or Terfel. Parts of the

Te Deum that are, in their own way, declarations of love (or lust) emerge with a rather gravelly tone. Does it matter? Not really: of the three principals on this recording, Gobbi has the most complete performance. You're never in any doubt he's pulling the strings, and, my goodness, he knows how to pull them – the character compares himself to Iago, and Gobbi (himself an Iago of distinction in Verdi's *Otello*) is a properly Shakespearean villain. One question I have for you: does he steal the show? Sometimes the entirety of Act 3 can seem a little redundant once the oily baron has been knifed.

MP He's a scene-stealing Scarpia. But it's confession time again: I've never loved Gobbi's dry baritone. I find it lacks juice, especially in the key Verdi roles; but he was a theatrical genius. You're so right to use the word 'Shakespearean', because his way with the text is masterly.

NF I love how he puts on the mask to trap *Tosca* – the change in his tone as he goes from barking out instructions to Spoletta one minute to dripping with honey the next as his prey approaches. That's real artistry.

MP After 1953, Gobbi and Callas recorded *Tosca* again, of course, in Paris in 1964, under Georges Prêtre. I suspect it was HMV's attempt to cash in on the 'Toscana' after that Covent Garden run, where fans queued overnight to grab

a golden ticket. It's nowhere near as successful, mainly because both Callas and Gobbi were past their prime: Gobbi sounds hollow in some phrases and Callas was in decline.

NF Lightning hasn't struck twice on the Prêtre recording, and certainly not for Gobbi. Callas, however, is still compelling in the later recording, trading on her vocal vulnerability to paint a different picture of *Tosca* as a more fragile creature. Listening to the two recordings afresh I was struck by how much more moved I was in the later recording by *Tosca*'s 'Egli vede ch'io piango!', which is delivered here in despairing half-voice, not – as in 1953 – as a lover's cry for vengeance.

MP Carlo Bergonzi was the Cavaradossi in Paris – beautifully sung, but a phoned-in performance, certainly no match for di Stefano. What do you make of our Cavaradossi on the de Sabata recording?

NF *Ecco un artista*, as *Tosca* says – what an artist. Arguably, di Stefano's sweet spot was even briefer than Callas's, but what freshness, suppleness and ardour he brings to Cavaradossi.

MP There's real sunshine in 'Recondita armonia', and he dismisses *Tosca*'s jealousy with the most gorgeous 'Qual' occhio al mondo' – warm and open. 'E lucevan le stelle' is exquisite.

NF These days the role tends to be given to bigger, harder voices, and perhaps it was precisely by singing roles such as Cavaradossi that di Stefano's voice started to fray. But there's such poetic imagination here.

MP I checked back to see when the tide turned for this recording in *Gramophone*. In his Quarterly Review in April 1954, Desmond Shawe-Taylor found Callas 'superb', though 'decisively inferior to Tebaldi' at the end of Act 2. But take a bow TB Hodgkiss, a reader from Ebbw Vale, whose letter in the February 1958 issue hits the nail on the head: 'Give me singers who can create a character for me; give me the dramatic intensity of a Callas or a Gobbi. I, for one, will greet every Callas-Gobbi recording with enthusiasm, for, although they are not always entirely successful, their recordings always bring a worthwhile experience and a new insight into the music performed.' Well, quite. **G**

Books



Geraint Lewis on a study of Britten's relationship with his texts:

'There are essays on microscopic matters – like Rebekah Scott's on Britten's attitude to the word "drop" in its various connotations'



David Threasher reads a new biography of Robert Schumann:

'Chernaik takes a novelist's approach to Schumann's relationships – with women, composers and poets, and with "philistines"'

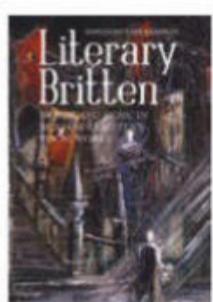
Literary Britten

Words and Music in Benjamin Britten's Vocal Works

Edited by Kate Kennedy

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At this year's Proms, following a recent Chandos CD release 'Come to me in My Dreams' (9/18),

Sarah Connolly presented the first public performances and world premiere recordings of two Britten songs – 'A Sweet Lullaby' and 'Somnus'. These were not yet more examples of officially released juvenilia (of which masses still remain safely stored away in Aldeburgh) but discarded offshoots from the 1947 cycle *A Charm of Lullabies* which were catalogued in the Britten-Pears Archive, though largely unexplored until Dame Sarah went looking and found six minutes of unperformed music. These needed Colin Matthews's expert editing, certainly, but they are a revelation and an unexpected treasure trove nonetheless. This composite essay collection *Literary Britten* (Vol 13 of the series Aldeburgh Studies in Music) thus appears at a time when 'new' examples of Britten's literary attentions continue to appear – Nicholas Breton (1542-1626) and John Denham (1615-1669) can now be added to the remarkably extensive list of poets the composer set.

It is, of course, well known to Britten enthusiasts that he often set more poems when working on a cycle than he needed (this was his general method rather than an exception), only to discard several of them during the final process of sifting and arranging the songs into a definitive order. All kinds of reasons for discarding come into play – and clearly these don't necessarily relate to intrinsic quality. One of the most significant revelations contained within *Literary Britten* is a chapter by Justin Vickers on the three-

page *Epilogue* which Britten completed on August 15, 1945, during composition of what became *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*. This was also sitting in the Aldeburgh Archive without arousing any undue attention – but with Britten's rejection of it indicated clearly in a top-left to bottom-right crossing out, as was the case with the two rejected *Charm* songs. The words he set in this instance come from Donne's 'Meditation XVII' containing the immortal phrases 'No man is an island' and 'never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee'. And from the pretty complete extracts included by Vickers (including a page of facsimile) Britten's setting doesn't disappoint. But the poem isn't a sonnet – and as an 'Epilogue' proper to the complete cycle it would have contradicted the satisfying finality of the last words of the final sonnet: 'Death, be not proud.'

Such a discovery, with its examination and explication, is what sets this volume apart. We now need an exploratory performance (ideally on disc) simply to allow the music to breathe. The vocal line, uniquely for Britten, remains on a monotone throughout – against richly spaced chords in the piano. One chapter, by Vicki P Stroher, is exclusively devoted to the use of monotonic lines and the approach towards them (the 'discursive shift') in a wide range of Britten's vocal works. There are several such essays on microscopic matters – like Rebekah Scott's on his attitude to the word 'drop' and its various liquid connotations. And Nicholas Clark is fascinating on how Britten and Myfanwy Piper dealt with Henry James's ambiguous ghosts. Others are much more wide-ranging. The most rewarding in this respect includes Brian Young's refreshing journey through Britten's encounters with various Romantic poets – Goethe, Hölderlin and Pushkin as much as Wordsworth, Blake and Shelley. This chimes nicely with overall editor Kate Kennedy's charting of how the composer compiled the ingredients of the 1958 *Nocturne* from a dazzling array of sources –

the sifting in action here before the composition actually started.

One or two factual blips pop up here and there: Jonathan Miller's celebrated production of *The Turn of the Screw* (page 102) was for ENO and not Kent Opera, who actually enjoyed the services of a young Nicholas Hytner for theirs; Walton's 1937 Coronation March (page 45) was *Crown Imperial* and not *Orb and Sceptre* (that one was in 1953 for Her present Majesty); and it was the Queen herself who commissioned *A Birthday Hansel* (page 100) in 1975, not the late Queen Mother, for whom it was a very apposite 75th birthday present from her daughters. More contentious is the editor's assertion, in a footnote (page 97-98), that after 1935 and the exception of setting Auden's 'Nocturne' in *On This Island*, Britten 'did not return to nocturnal themes in earnest until *Nocturne* in 1958'. So quite where this leaves the night-inspired *Serenade* of 1943 and *A Charm of Lullabies* I don't quite know. The overall range of the volume is, however, impressive – and several of the major operas and cycles are examined in detail, as are individual poets and librettists. Britten's way with words will sustain several more volumes like this one for years to come but as a gateway here is an admirable start.

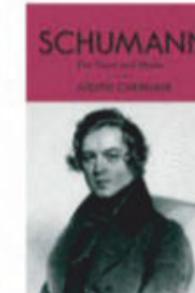
Geraint Lewis

Schumann The Faces and Masks

By Judith Chernaik

Faber & Faber, HB, 349pp, £20

ISBN 978-0-571-33126-0



Did he or didn't he? Common wisdom has it that Schumann, like Schubert before him, died of tertiary syphilis, interred in the asylum at Endenich, all but deserted by his critical faculties, grasp on reality and ability to compose. Other recent biographers have attempted



Still misunderstood: Judith Chernaik deals with the life and death of Robert Schumann, as well as his music

to show that, despite the composer's own protestations, syphilis wasn't a factor in his final descent and death. Both Erik Jensen's *Master Musicians* volume (OUP: 2001) and Martin Geck (U of Chicago Press, 11/13) demonstrate that Schumann's symptoms differ sufficiently from those of the French pox to discount it as a culprit; Jonathan Noble, too, in his masterly recent summary of Schumann's pathology (*That Jealous Demon, My Wretched Health*; Boydell,

10/18) cannot ascribe his suffering and death to the disease.

Judith Chernaik, however, has accessed newly released archival material, including the medical diary of Franz Richarz, the director of the asylum. Accordingly the comings and goings of Schumann's time there – from March 4, 1854, to his death on July 29, 1856 – are recounted in grim and harrowing detail. It transpires that Richarz judiciously kept a record of his

twice-daily rounds. In 1988 these diaries were acquired by the composer Aribert Reimann, who later deposited them in the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. They were finally published in 2006, a century and a half after Schumann's death.

It is on the basis of Richarz's records that Chernaik comes down firmly on the side of syphilis as the cause of Schumann's death, manifested by general paresis (GPI or general paralysis of the insane). Thus the debate enters a new phase. At this distance the whole truth will surely never be pinned down but it remains important to read contrasting biographical treatments in tandem. The reader may feel as if caught in the crossfire of a 'he says, she says' rally. An open mind is the best protection from the brickbats.

So much for the death: it is the life and the music that flowed from it that is important. Chernaik is a novelist and takes a novelist's approach to Schumann's relationships – with women, with other composers, with poets and with the 'philistines' against whom he engaged for so long in mental fight. It is clear she loves the music and is amply able to describe it for her stated audience, 'the general reader, the music lover who may have no specialised musical training'. Her responses to the relationships between words and music – so important to this irrepressible song-writer – are acute; her championship of 'problem' works such as *Das Paradies und die Peri* and *Der Rose Pilgerfahrt* is as valuable as her appreciation of the prolific early piano miniatures and songs.

Rarely do words fail her, although her description of the Violin Concerto as 'a virtuoso showpiece for the violin, with a slow movement that in the hands of a great violinist often reduces listeners to tears' has no place in even the most sensational biography. One might wish for a more thorough treatment of late works such as the Mass and the Requiem, beyond simply saying that 'both can now be heard on the Internet' – especially as there are now at least four commercial recordings of each. Indeed, the treatment of the late music feels somewhat rushed: perhaps understandable if Chernaik was eager to get to the meat of the story – the horror of the final years.

Chernaik nevertheless has an evident sympathy for Schumann, both the man in all his moods and the music, whether masterpiece or forgotten gem. Her experience as a storyteller ensures that we are never bored by Schumann's (or Chernaik's) company and results in a valuable addition to this sophisticated, still misunderstood composer's controversial biographical roll. **David Thrasher**

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Beethoven's 'Waldstein' Sonata

Beethoven's Op 53 represented a revolution in his piano style, says **Patrick Rucker**, as he sifts through almost a century of recordings

Beethoven took greater care of his sketchbooks than he did of his finished manuscripts. One of those fabled laboratories of creative imagination is called Landsberg 6, named for a collector who purchased the carefully bound volume after the composer's death. Beethoven used it from late 1802 through early 1804, covering its 192 pages with several hundred sketches and drafts, including early ideas for both the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, as well as for the Triple Concerto and *Fidelio*. But the most extensive sketches are those for two large-scale works, each of which would be a pivotal landmark in its genre: the *Eroica* Symphony and the *Waldstein* Sonata.

The Sonata in C major, Op 53, was published in Vienna in May 1805 with a dedication to Beethoven's early friend and patron Ferdinand Ernst Gabriel, Count von Waldstein (1762–1823). Born in Vienna, Waldstein lived in Bonn from early 1788, where he was made a knight of the Teutonic Order and became a privy councillor to the Archbishop-Elector. One contemporary report mentions that the young composer 'often received financial support' from Waldstein, 'bestowed with such consideration for his easily wounded feelings that Beethoven usually assumed they were small gratuities from the Elector'. It was the Count who, in November 1792, wrote in Beethoven's album the oft-quoted prediction: 'With the help of unceasing diligence you will receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn.' Although the two men had long been out of contact, Beethoven's dedication of Op 53 was the richest possible fulfilment of his friend's prophecy.

The most obvious feature distinguishing the *Waldstein* from the 20 sonatas Beethoven had already published is its extraordinary

technical challenge, well beyond the ken of any amateur pianist of the day. A review in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* concludes: 'The first and last movements belong among the most brilliant and original pieces for which we are grateful to this master, but they are also full of strange whims and very difficult to perform.' Unlike any other sonata, all three movements of Op 53 begin *pianissimo*. An extraordinary sense of propulsion is established at the outset of the opening *Allegro con brio*, also without parallel in Beethoven. Moreover, as Charles Rosen pointed out, many harmonic, figurative and textural procedures that had formerly been reserved for concertos are introduced into the framework of a sonata for the first time, lending the *Waldstein* its special drama and brilliance. The sonata's expanded keyboard compass, along with its unconventional pedal indications, was clearly inspired by the fine Érard piano that the Paris maker sent Beethoven in 1803.

Beethoven himself never played his sonatas publicly, though it seems his pupils Carl Czerny, Dorothea von Ertmann and Ferdinand Ries did. Ignaz Moscheles too was an important early Beethoven exponent but it was the later generation of Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann who fixed the sonatas at the core of every pianist's repertoire. Two pupils of Czerny who would become prolific teachers themselves, Liszt and Theodor Leschetizky, established the pianistic bloodlines leading back to Beethoven that, as demonstrated in this discography, are still traceable today.

As befits an innovative and visionary artwork that has been the object of widespread, admiring attention during the 214 years of its existence, some 175-odd recorded performances crowd the current catalogue. A mere 20 have been considered



here, unfortunately excluding many distinguished Beethovenians – Edwin Fischer, Rubinstein, Kempff, Arrau, Annie Fischer, Kovacevich, Pollini, Goode and Schiff among them. My choices were motivated by the diversity of approach the *Waldstein* has inspired, the chance to advocate for lesser-known recordings and, of course, personal preference.

ECHOES OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Of the last generation of Liszt pupils, the Scots pianist **Frederic Lamond** was internationally acclaimed as a pre-eminent Beethoven player. One of his favourite recital programmes began with the *Hammerklavier*, followed by Opp 110 and 111 and the *Waldstein*, and concluded



The fulfilment of a prophecy: the opening page of the manuscript of Beethoven's 'Waldstein' Sonata

with the *Appassionata*. Ward Marston's superb transfers of the 1922-23 *Waldstein* Lamond made for HMV give a good idea of what a formidable Beethoven interpreter he must have been. Lamond's playing has an inerrant sense of momentum and a high degree of accuracy, and is filled with vivid contrasts. Interestingly, Lamond doesn't observe the slight caesuras between texturally contrasting sections that most players do today, as for instance in preparing the chorale-like second theme of the first movement. There is also a tendency, typical of the period, to short-change rests. What does emerge is a structural grasp that lends the sonata a compelling expressive arc, without stinting on detail. The sprightly, brilliant and

beautifully paced *Prestissimo* coda of the last movement is a sheer delight. Above all, Lamond's enveloping love of the music seems to permeate every bar.

More than any other pianist, **Artur Schnabel** is virtually synonymous with Beethoven. He first played the series of 32 sonatas at the Berlin Volksbühne in 1927, repeating the cycle in Berlin again, London and New York. Despite his ambivalence towards the studio, Schnabel's complete Beethoven sonata cycle for HMV, set down between 1932 and 1935, was the first to be recorded. The continued prestige of Schnabel's recordings, however, is not due solely to precedent but to their enduring musical qualities. In many ways, his *Waldstein* is typical of his way with

the middle-period sonatas: extremely rapid outer movements, sometimes hectically rushed, and an extraordinarily slow middle movement that collectively result in a cohesive and intellectually compelling performance of singular power. Another Schnabel trademark, figuration played with great expressivity, is also prominent throughout.

On April 18, 1969, four months prior to his death at 85, **Wilhelm Backhaus** was recorded in a recital at the Berlin Philharmonie consisting of four Beethoven sonatas: Opp 28, 31 No 3, 53 and 109. One of the strongest techniques in modern piano-playing was still relatively intact. Even more remarkable is that Backhaus's musical sensibility, essentially formed

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before the turn of the 20th century, sounded so freshly robust. Here, after all, was a pianist who studied with d'Albert and had been discovered by Nikisch. Naturally, Backhaus's *Waldstein* contains discernible hints of his advanced age and musical vintage. More than a few octaves are split, for example, chords in both hands are slightly arpeggiated on occasion and the *Prestissimo* coda is slowed down to accommodate octave glissandos played from the wrist. Nevertheless, Backhaus's straightforward, heroic concept, imaginative exploitation of instrumental sonority and proliferation of finely executed details mark his *Waldstein* as fully representative of the 19th-century 'grand manner'.

Walter Gieseking, on the other hand, came of age during the 20th century, and his *Waldstein*, recorded in 1951, exhibits some aspects recognisable as 19th-century holdovers and others as more modern. The *Allegro con brio*, played without repeat, is one of the more relaxed of the recordings examined here. There is little of the flawless legato and intellectual rigour of Schnabel or the robustness of Backhaus. The *Adagio molto* of the middle movement is sped up to an *andante comodo*, mitigating its contrast with the outer movements. Ultimately, Gieseking's fastidious *Waldstein* sounds more dutiful than inspired. In his defence, Harold Schonberg observed that listening to Gieseking after the Second World War was almost like hearing a different pianist.

EMERGING VOICES AFTER THE GREAT WAR AND BEYOND

Within eight days in 1903, two pianists who became noted Beethoven exponents were born in the Habsburg Empire: Rudolf Serkin (born March 28 in Eger, now Cheb, Czech Republic) and Lili Kraus (April 3 in Budapest). In concert, **Rudolf Serkin** projected a disarmingly human persona. One felt in the presence of a formidable musician, deeply reflective, always modest and self-effacing, who shared with his listeners both the loftiness of his goal and, however unwittingly, the herculean effort its achievement cost him. Something of



Friend and dedicatee: Count von Waldstein

this self-imposed pressure, as well as his innate personal sweetness, carries over into Serkin's 1952 recording (he re-recorded the *Waldstein* in 1975 and in a still unreleased 1987 session). Serkin's extrovert reading, with its pervasive non-legato in the opening *Allegro*, some heavy lifting in the Rondo and overall steely sound renders this a monument to Beethoven in handsome, rusticated stone.

During the 1920s **Lili Kraus** often made her debut with various European orchestras playing Beethoven's Fourth Concerto. However, it was her widely admired recordings of the violin sonatas with Szymon Goldberg the following decade that secured her reputation as a Beethoven interpreter. In her 1953 *Waldstein*, the opening repeated quavers create an uncanny sound, evoking lower strings using the smallest bow strokes, as though a continuously sounding triad were pulsating. Throughout the movement, the dynamic elements of the sonata-allegro dialectic are vividly characterised. The *Introduzione* describes a new landscape, self-contained and rhetorically poised. When profound introspection yields at last to open vistas, the music embarks on a lofty trajectory that lasts until the *Prestissimo* coda, which erupts

in a celebration so ebullient that its earthy roots cannot be denied.

However complicated the artistic legacy of **Emil Gilels** may have become in light of post-Soviet historiography, the high standards of his pianism remain inviolable. Most pianists would prefer tackling the *Waldstein* after warming up to the hall and audience but Gilels was so comfortable with the piece that he didn't hesitate to programme it first in his recitals. His 1972 recording for DG was intended as part of a complete set of Beethoven sonatas left unfinished at his death. Gilels's preference for the Apollonian over the Dionysian produces an opening movement with an unhurried *Allegro* minus the *con brio*. The *Adagio* remains imperturbable throughout, resulting in a Rondo that, despite all its sonorous beauty and indisputable decorum, is slightly anticlimactic. If one is left wanting a greater degree of personal involvement, Gilels's finely calibrated technical polish can still inspire awe, even in our age of technically flawless pianism.

Listeners with no first-hand experience of the iconoclastic, fiercely contrarian pianist **Friedrich Gulda** who, from the 1950s, actively pursued interests in jazz and composition alongside his career as a classical pianist, may be surprised to hear in his *Waldstein* scant evidence of the improvisational freedom or personal utterance his extra-classical interests might suggest. Temperamentally, Gulda's interpretations tended towards the objective. If less strait-laced than his Bach performances, this taut and stringent *Waldstein* from 1957 seems little concerned with variety of touch or colour. Gulda's liberation from what he came to consider the hidebound rigidity of his classical training was yet to come.

As befits a career in which Beethoven has occupied prime real estate, the *Waldstein* of **Alfred Brendel** commands great authority. Had Brendel not written perceptively about many aspects of Op 53, it would be obvious from his performance alone that his final conception emerged only after all possible interpretative implications

THE HISTORICAL CHOICE

Lili Kraus

Erato ⑤ (31 discs) 2564 62422-3

Without exceeding classical restraint and proportion, Lili Kraus, in her 1953 recording

of Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata, achieves a rhetorical eloquence that is simultaneously exalted, richly imaginative and deeply personal.



that guarantees this *Waldstein* - now over 30 years old and part of Jandó's complete sonata cycle for Naxos - a place among the most satisfying.

THE BUDGET CHOICE

Jenő Jandó

Naxos ⑤ 8 550054

From beginning to end, Jenő Jandó exudes a robust health and directness of utterance



musical narrative spanning three disparate movements, suggesting a compelling spiritual journey of transformative power.

Steven Osborne

Hyperion ⑤ CDA67662

Over the course of 27 riveting minutes, Steven Osborne creates a trenchant



were scrutinised and weighed. Brendel's *Waldstein* contains extraordinary richness in both colour and detail that yearns towards Romanticism, yet remains within Classical realms in its objectivity and proportion. His ability to vividly convey Beethoven's mighty architecture, to disambiguate points of departure and arrival, is one of Brendel's many strengths. His seriousness of purpose is echoed in the Philips engineers' wonderfully lifelike sound in this 1993 recording, allowing us to hear not only the piano but the room as well.

When **Daniel Barenboim** first played the 32 Beethoven sonatas in Tel Aviv in 1960, he was the youngest pianist in recent memory to play the entire cycle publicly. Certainly few recording artists may claim a closer first-hand relationship with Beethoven, since Barenboim's experience as both conductor and pianist includes the symphonies, concertante works and choral and chamber music, in addition to solo piano works. The *Waldstein* considered here was filmed live during eight concerts at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, Berlin, in June and July 2005. First released as an EMI DVD set, it has subsequently been released as CDs on Decca. In clarity and precision, with every element scrupulously ordered, Barenboim's *Waldstein* is probably *sui generis*. His perfectly gauged, pure sound is a marvel and could serve as a metaphor for Barenboim's intellectually honest playing. Yet the flipside of this Olympian conception is a certain sense of removal from emotional immediacy. The performance of this particular sonata seems curiously free of spiritual struggle, without which an urgent sense of resolution remains remote.

THE LATER 20th AND EARLY 21st CENTURIES

It is more than three decades since **Jenő Jandó** recorded Op 53 as part of his complete series for Naxos, turning in a performance that has proudly withstood the test of time. When Jandó's Beethoven is mentioned among recommendations for complete sets, as it almost invariably is, the discussion always seems prefaced by 'for the budget-conscious'. Certainly this *Waldstein* needs no such qualification. In a vibrant and sparklingly clear *Allegro con brio*, phrases are given plenty of room to breathe, even as Jandó maintains a propulsion that brooks no impediment. This is no engine firing on all cylinders but an implacable forward surge, fuelled by boundless exuberance. But there's more here than visceral excitement. Once the development really gets cooking, conscientious artists will sometimes over-characterise the thematic hide-and-seek,



Lili Kraus: achieves 'rhetorical elegance' in 1953

creating an inadvertently comic effect. Jandó takes another path. He creates a steady build almost from the beginning of the development, incrementally increasing in tension and mass until we feel perched at the summit of a towering mountain range. Then, with a sudden turn of the wheel, we're back in the open terrain of the recapitulation, in a display of exhilarating mastery that seems a force of nature.

When the definitive cultural history of music-making after the Second World War is written, surely the so-called Historically Informed Performance movement will loom large. For pianists, its influence has spread beyond practitioners of early instruments and enriched mainstream pianism.

According to Ann P Basart's discography

The Sound of the Fortepiano, Jörg Demus made the first recording of the *Waldstein* on a historical instrument in 1970, using an 1802 Broadwood. It was over a decade before the next recordings appeared, by Paul Badura-Skoda, Malcolm Binns and Anthony Newman, all in 1981.

The first of the two 'original instrument' recordings in this discography, however, is the 2007 recording of **Ronald Brautigam**. His *Waldstein* uses a Paul McNulty replica of a Conrad Graf instrument from about 1819 and is part of a series of Beethoven's complete piano music on BIS. Listening to Brautigam, we hear the special qualities of clarity and definition, the pure colour palette, the differentiation of registers and the altered proportions inherent in early 19th-century pianos. But we also hear ardent, witty, perceptive music-making of breathtaking virtuosity and charm.

Louis Lortie, on the other hand, seems intent on mining every last expressive nuance the modern piano is capable of in his 1991 *Waldstein*. The shapely phrasing and flowing contours make this a sensually beautiful reading. Not surprisingly for a pianist who excels in many varied repertoires, Lortie seems fully present in every bar. The same might be said of **Andreas Haefliger**, each annual instalment of whose 'Perspectives' series, begun in 2004, is built around a Beethoven sonata or two. He plays a heartfelt and stylish *Waldstein* that is rhetorically apt and rich with imagery. Surely few pianists are more dedicated to Beethoven than Haefliger, and his programming is a strong argument for recording the sonatas over an extended period rather than during the

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS

1923	Frederic Lamond
1934	Artur Schnabel
1951	Walter Giesecking
1952	Rudolf Serkin
1953	Lili Kraus
1957	Friedrich Gulda
1969	Wilhelm Backhaus
1972	Emil Gilels
1987	Jenő Jandó
1991	Louis Lortie
1993	Alfred Brendel
2005	Daniel Barenboim
2006	Paul Lewis
2007	Ronald Brautigam
2008	Steven Osborne
2008	Andreas Haefliger
2010	François-Frédéric Guy
2013	Jonathan Biss
2015	Boris Giltburg
2016	Olga Pashchenko

RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

Marston	(F) 52701-2 (4/25)
EMI/Warner Classics	(S) (8) 265064-2 (10/36 ^R , 8/09); (S) (8) 9029 59750-5 (12/15)
EMI/Warner Classics	(M) (D) 567585-2 (10/53 ^R)
Music & Arts	(F) CD1141
Erato	(S) (31 discs) 2564 62422-3 (1/15)
Decca	(B) (2) 443 012-2DF2
Audite	(B) (2) AUDITE23 420
DG	(M) (D) 419 162-2GH (11/72 ^R , 8/86)
Naxos	(S) 8 550054
Chandos	(F) CHAN9024 (4/92)
Philips	(M) (D) 438 472-2PH (11/93)
EMI	(F) (DVD) 368996-9; Decca (S) (10) 478 3549DX10
Harmonia Mundi	(S) (10) HMX290 1902/11 (12/06 ^R)
BIS	(F) BIS-SACD1573
Hyperion	(F) CDA67662 (6/10)
Avie	(F) AVIE2173 (7/10)
Zig-Zag Territoires	(M) (3) ZZT304 (A/12)
Onyx	(F) ONYX4115 (3/14)
Naxos	(M) 8 573400 (10/15)
Alpha	(F) ALPHA365 (10/17)

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Wit and youthful optimism: Jonathan Biss

two- or three-year total immersion that many pianists have required to record all 32. **François-Frédéric Guy** set himself the extraordinary challenge of recording his sonata cycle live in 2010 in Ricardo Bofill's exquisite, repurposed room of the Arsenal in Metz. The outer movements of his Op 53 are not overly fast but appropriately energetic. The *Adagio molto*, on the other hand, is very slow indeed and provides not only contrast but the platform from which the Rondo takes wing, with plenty of reserves left over for the *Prestissimo* coda.

The *Waldstein* of **Steven Osborne** is at once original in concept and the attainment of a classical ideal. In an *Allegro con brio* fairly bursting with energy and rhythmical élan, the overriding impression is one of profound lyricism. Beautifully shaped phrases are set in textures of sumptuous variety. Osborne has an amply equipped arsenal of attack-and-release strategies throughout his range but his infinitely calibrated dynamics are most remarkable at the soft end of the spectrum. The intricate drama of the development unfolds with an urgency that keeps you on the edge of your seat, uncertain of the outcome. Any shift from this heightened level of excitement might seem abrupt but the *Adagio* immediately establishes the aura of hallowed realms, imbued with oracular mystery. From there, an atmosphere of ethereal calm attends the first glimpse of the Elysian Fields at the beginning of the *Allegretto moderato*. The remaining peaks and valleys are navigated without misstep and always with an eye towards grandeur.

Steeped as he is in the idioms of Beethoven and Schubert, **Paul Lewis** plays an Op 53 that can afford to part company

with the mainstream. Eschewing extroversion, the opening *Allegro* seems almost quietly confiding. In fact, an aura of intimacy envelopes the entire sonata, appealingly and quite persuasively, thanks to the earnestness and strength of Lewis's musical personality.

Listening to **Jonathan Biss**'s 2013 *Waldstein*, one intuits a musical sensibility whose prime motivating purpose is the understanding and imaginative

re-creation of Beethoven. This sensibility is fortified by deeply cultured musicianship, enriched with an aural imagination satisfied only with the fullest exploitation of the piano's expressive sonorities. In combination, these attributes result in a grippingly persuasive *Waldstein*. The *Allegro con brio* proceeds as if an epidemic of energetic joy were run rampant. The voice speaking at the outset of the *Adagio* is so self-effacingly reverent that when it rises in eloquent song, it comes as a surprise. Certainly flight informs the finale, but so do the roar of cataracts, the progress of mighty rivers, great winds and abundant sunshine. At the *Prestissimo* coda, it's as though every bell in Vienna has begun to ring at precisely the same moment. This is a *Waldstein* that fulfils Cicero's rhetorical imperative to inform, persuade and delight, though Biss provides a triple measure of the latter.

Extraordinary poise and polish characterise the 2015 *Waldstein* of **Boris Giltburg**. The same freshness of vision encountered in his superb Rachmaninov recordings is evident, as though the interpretation had been painstakingly built from the ground up, free of preconceptions or received wisdom. Transparent textures have the clarity of a mountain spring and Beethoven's architecture is cast in a brilliant light. (More's the pity he omits the repeat of the first-movement exposition.) There are moments, however, when Giltburg's penchant for clarity puts him at odds with the washes of sound Beethoven clearly indicates with his lavish pedal markings. The Rondo seems somehow restrained, as if Giltburg were bridling his natural instincts. But it's in this same

Rondo that his extraordinary left hand, seemingly with a mind and will all of its own, is showcased.

The last of our *Waldsteins* is also, hands down, the most orchestral in sound. That is due in part to the excellent fingers and aural imagination of **Olga Pashchenko** but also to her instrument: a Viennese by Conrad Graf from 1824, held at the Beethovenhaus in Bonn, which dates from one of the more extravagant periods of piano manufacture and has, among other features, five pedals. The qualities of this piano, which can sound so exotic to us, were in fact typical of the instruments Beethoven knew and loved.

CONCLUSION

There are four recordings I value above the others, which means they're the ones I listen to most frequently, always with pleasure. They have certain things in common. Each artist seems to me fully present in every note and has internalised Beethoven's message, as each understood it, to the extent of making it completely his or her own. Recreating this unique masterpiece via the medium of recording, all seem to have done so with great conviction and from a full and open heart.

The earliest is that of Lili Kraus, whose conception strikes a balance between extroversion and inward eloquence, bringing to mind some of the finer aspects of European sensibilities before the Great War. I treasure Jenő Jandó's performance for its bracing emotional health and unaffected candour. Very few pianists before the public today equal Steven Osborne's sovereign mastery of so many diverse repertoires; Osborne's Beethoven speaks with earnestness and moral authority, and his *Waldstein* Sonata, in terms of clarity, proportion and sheer beauty, exemplifies a lofty classical ideal. But if some cruel circumstance left me with the choice of only one recording of the *Waldstein* for the rest of my days, I would take the one by Jonathan Biss, for its wit and youthful optimism, its breadth and the humanity that informs its portrayal of Beethoven's masterpiece. G

THE ULTIMATE CHOICE

Jonathan Biss Onyx ® ONYX4115

Jonathan Biss launched his highly regarded Beethoven sonata survey in 2012 and it continues with annual releases. There is something elemental in the way Biss

evokes the titanic Beethoven but he does so with the most exquisite, unforced, multi-dimensional sound, rendering it profoundly human.



PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream where you want, when you want

Beethoven from Vienna's Konzerthaus

Andrés Orozco-Estrada conducts the Vienna Symphony, January 1

Beethoven's Symphony No 9 is the single joyous work on the programme as the Vienna Symphony welcome in the new year joined by their Music Director Designate, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, with the Wiener Singakademie.

takt1.com/video/stream/silvester-wiener-symphoniker-orozco-estrada

Linbury Theatre, Covent Garden

The Royal Opera House's Cinema Festival, until January 6

It launched last month, but the Royal Opera House's first ever Cinema Festival has a week left to run and is well worth going to. Designed to celebrate the breadth of ballet and opera repertory the company has shown in cinemas since its first broadcast 10 years ago, the festival has been standing out in particular for how accessible it is to families, because children can go free to all Saturday and Sunday cinema matinee performances; and still to go on the family front are *Romeo and Juliet* on December 29, Richard Jones's staging of *La bohème* on December 30, Liam Scarlett's version of *Swan Lake* on January 5 and to bring the festival to a close on

January 6, *Giselle*. Something for everyone! roh.org.uk/cinemafestival

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

Adriana Lecouvreur, January 12

It's Gianandrea Noseda in the Met's pit for Sir David McVicar's popular staging of Cilea's tale of a real-life French actress who dazzled 18th century audiences with her on- and offstage passions. First premiered at Covent Garden, McVicar's production sets the action in a working replica of a Baroque theatre, and this particular New York run stands out for its cast, led by Anna Netrebko in what is her Met debut in this title role. She's joined by Piotr Beczała as Adriana's lover, Maurizio, while the principal cast also features mezzo Anita Rachvelishvili and baritone Ambrogio Maestri. metopera.org, metliveinhd.co.uk

Concertgebouw, Amsterdam & online

Elim Chan's Russian spectacular, January 21

Some of the world's finest emerging talent is onstage at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw for this month's free live-streamed lunchtime concert from the Rotterdam Philharmonic. On the conductor's podium is Elim Chan, Chief Conductor Designate of the Antwerp

Symphony Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Then the cellist joining them for Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* is Pablo Ferrandez. Following the Tchaikovsky is more Russian fare in the form of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*. concertgebouw.nl/en/live-streams

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & cinemas worldwide

The Queen of Spades, January 22

The Queen of Spades is one of Tchaikovsky's most impressive and varied scores, and also one of his most all-round colourful operas. It returns to the Covent Garden stage here in Stefan Herheim's spectacular production: one which puts Tchaikovsky at the heart of the action, asking questions about the nature of creativity. Sir Antonio Pappano conducts, and its strong cast is headed by Eva-Maria Westbroek as Liza, and Aleksandrs Antonenko as the penniless soldier Gherman who falls in love with her. Also on the cast are Felicity Palmer, John Lundgren, Alexander Krevets, Anna Goyachova, Tigran Martirossian, Louise Winter, Harry Nicoll, Jacquelyn Stucker, Konu Kim and Michael Mofidian. roh.org.uk, roh.org.uk/showings

ONLINE CONCERT (AUDIO) REVIEW

Claus Peter Flor launches a Milanese Mahler symphony cycle, conducting laVerdi, with the Ninth

Mahler

Milan is not an obvious port of call for Mahler, though as recently as four years ago the Italian division of Decca released a La Scala Ninth conducted by Daniel Barenboim as a memorial to Claudio Abbado, the house's former Music Director. Claus Peter Flor has inaugurated his tenure as Music Director of the city's 'other' orchestra, formerly the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi and now rebranded as laVerdi, with Mahler's last completed symphony (the rest are projected to follow).

Like Barenboim's swift but oddly somnambulistic account it's a live recording, made earlier this year



exclusively for the streaming platform idagio. Attendant slips are to be expected, especially in the outer movements where Flor tends to underline or land on cadence points, and a few corners of the Rondo-Burleske are negotiated on two wheels. No matter. Unlike Barenboim, Flor revels in the Ninth's generic heterogeneity and glaring debt to the *Pathétique*

(in November he led laVerdi in a Tchaikovsky cycle) in which dances, fugue and lament add up to a satisfying but open-ended answer to the first movement's major-minor conflict.

Flor's musicians follow him with a will (he had been Principal Guest since 2003) and no small degree of flair – is it fanciful to imagine a *Traviata*-like, nervous tension to all those trilling flutes in the Scherzo? In any event, this is not a Ninth beset by care: its culmination and extinction is handled with dignity and an unexaggerated *cantabile* that apparently comes as second nature. **Peter Quantrill**
Available with a subscription to idagio.com which starts at €9.99 per month.

**Germanisches Nationalmuseum,
Nuremberg & live-streamed on BR-Klassik**
Musiqua Antiqua, January 23

The Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg houses a collection of musical instruments dating from the 16th century to the 20th, so it's the perfect venue for this concert from Bern's Orchestra for Ancient Music, Les Passions de L'Amé, under the direction of concertmaster Meret Luthi. Amongst the highlights of this varied programme being live-streamed for free by BR-Klassik is Telemann's Concerto a 4 for recorder, oboe, violin and basso continuo, with Dorothee Oberlinger (recorder) and Shai Kribus (oboe). Also on the menu are Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* Nos 2 and 3, plus works by Zelenka and Vivaldi.

lespassions.ch, br-klassik.de/concert/

**Herkulesaal, Munich & live
on BR-Klassik Concert**

**Mariss Jansons conducts Richard
Strauss & Bruckner, January 25**

It's a feast of vocal music being served up in this concert from the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and its Choir under Mariss Jansons, which is livestreamed for free on BR-Klassik Concert. First up are Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, sung by Diana Damrau. Then comes Bruckner's Mass No 3 in F minor, for which the orchestra and choir are joined by soloists Sally Matthews, Karen Cargill, İlker Arcayürek and Stanislav Trofimov.

br-so.de/mariss-jansons-diana-damrau-p13326/

Philharmonie, Berlin & Digital Concert Hall

**Prokofiev from Lisa Batiashvili
and Alan Gilbert, January 26**

Lisa Batiashvili's fine DG album 'Visions of Prokofiev' secured her a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice and it made it to the shortlist of the 2018 Awards. It's the second of the two Prokofiev violin concertos that she brings to the Berliner Philharmoniker under the guest baton of the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra's Chief Conductor Designate, Alan Gilbert. Also on the programme is Richard Strauss's *Symphonia domestica*, and to open the programme the European premiere of *Metacosmos* by Anna Thorvaldsdottir - the subject of this month's 'Contemporary Composer' on page 68.

digitalconcerthall.com

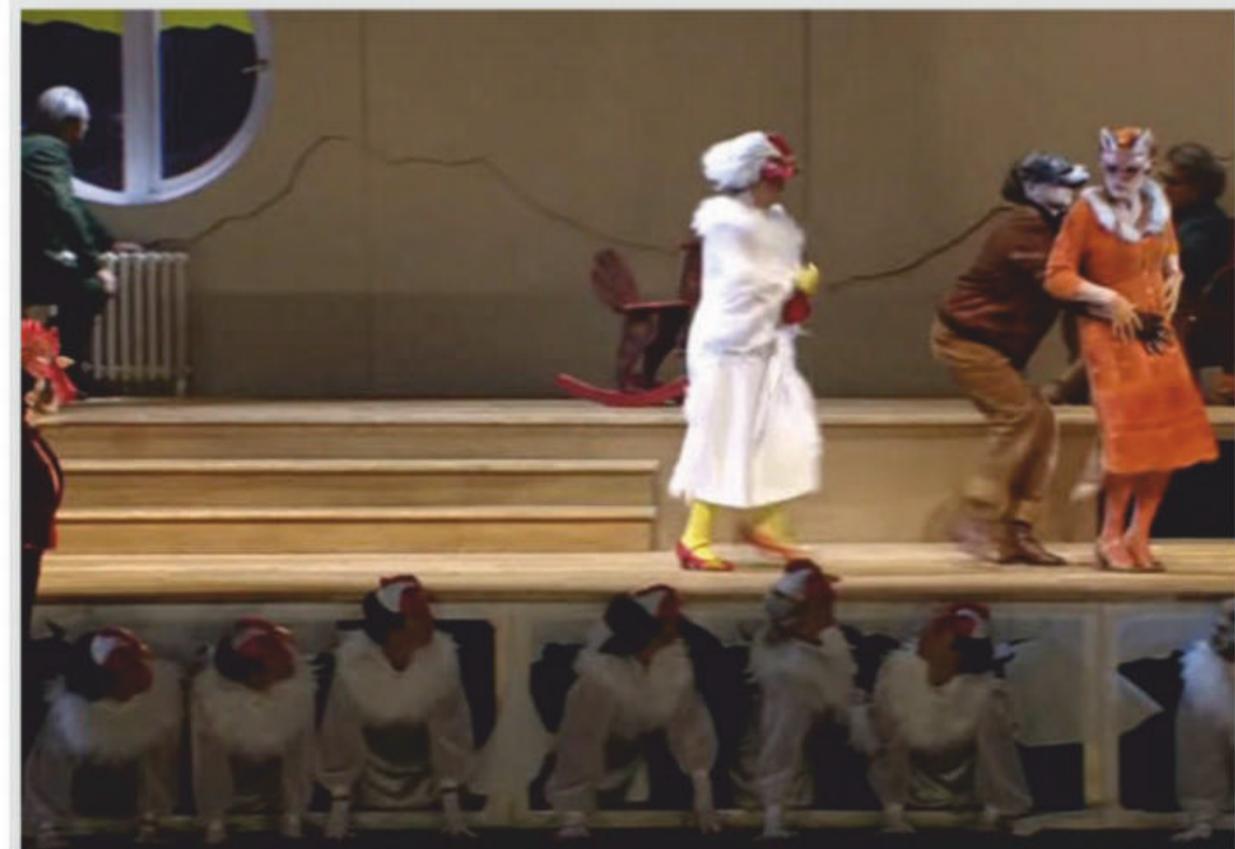
**Orchestra Hall, Detroit & online
on the orchestra's website**

Karina Canellakis conducts

Shostakovich, January 27

Karina Canellakis has had something of a meteoric rise since winning the Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award in 2016, and once you've seen and heard her live it's not hard

ONLINE OPERA REVIEW
Leoš Janáček's enchanting *Cunning Little Vixen* returns to Brno



Janáček

Janáček's inspiration for his opera *The Cunning Little Vixen* was Rudolf Těsnohlídek's series of stories about Vixen Sharp-ears in the newspaper *Lidové noviny*. For his staging at Brno's Janáček Theatre, the director Jiří Heřman draws on an episode from Těsnohlídek's life. In December 1919, the writer was strolling in the woods in Bílovice when he found an abandoned infant girl, whom he rescued. He later established a Christmas fundraising campaign, which enabled the construction of the Dagmar Children's Home and it's in this home that Heřman sets the opera.

The Forester (excellent baritone Svatopluk Sem, in dark voice) runs the

home. Seeing a little lad with his toy frog sets him reminiscing, realising his life has reached its autumn. He recounts the story of the Vixen (sparky soprano Jana Šrejma Kačirková, without a note of sourness). The cast flutters giant butterfly wings and Dragan Stojčevski's set opens up to suggest the forest beyond. There's plenty of knockabout humour, but the poignant moments still hit home. The Forester's wife knits a scarf throughout, hanging from the flies by the time the opera ends in its tear-inducing state of bliss. Marko Ivanović conducts a lively account, teasing out the intricate details in Janáček's tingling score. **Mark Pullinger**

Available to watch for free on operavision.eu until May 17, 2019.

to see why, such is her combination of interpretational fire and technical command (as she recently proved in front of the London Philharmonic). Next season she takes up the role of Chief Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. This season meanwhile is full of debuts with the likes of the Oslo Philharmonic. Here she returns to the Detroit Symphony whom she conducts in Shostakovich's Symphony No 8 after Schumann's Piano Concerto for which she's joined by soloist Lise de la Salle.

dso.org

Royal Opera House, Covent

Gardner & cinemas worldwide

Antonello Manacorda conducts a stellar cast in *La traviata*, January 30

We all know the story, and indeed many

of us will be familiar with David Ayre's sumptuous production, which places the story in its original 19th-century world. However whether you're the type who enjoys revisiting classic productions of the core of core repertoire, or the type who prefers the new, this particular revival is one you'll want to catch. For starters because it finds Antonello Manacorda making his Covent Garden debut: he's the Artistic Director of the Kammerakademie Potsdam, whose long list of operatic credentials on the continent include a longstanding relationship with Venice's Teatro La Fenice. Then there's the fact that his cast is led by Ermonela Jaho as Violetta and Charles Castronovo as Alfredo. Alfredo's overprotective father meanwhile is sung by the tenor-turned-baritone Plácido Domingo.

roh.org.uk, roh.org.uk/showings

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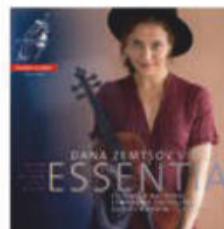
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THIS MONTH Bargain audio buys from Denon and Wharfedale, and a look at what the future might hold for audio exhibitions.

Andrew Everard,
Audio Editor

JANUARY TEST DISCS



With a gloriously open and detailed sound in resolutions all the way up to DSD256, this Channel Classics set by viola player Dana Zemtsov delights.



For once, a jazz album: this set by the Rembrandt Frerichs Trio (Just Listen label) is notable for its use of the forte piano, and its remarkable sound.

'Power, style and affordable streaming'

A heavyweight US amplifier; more stylish Kanta speakers from Focal, and a classy Marantz network player

There seems to be an inexhaustible appetite for big, powerful amplifiers in the US, and the latest arrival is the new MC312 power amp from McIntosh ①, delivering 300Wpc and selling for £9995 via UK distributor Jordan Acoustics. Based on the MC302, which it replaces, the amplifier uses the company's Autoformer technology to ensure its full power can be delivered into almost any speaker load, while improved power supply capability increases the dynamic headroom by 27 per cent, reducing distortion and improving bass performance.

Also new are pass-through outputs on both RCAs and XLRs, to allow the connection of additional amps for biamping, or a subwoofer, while the amp now has the company's 'monogram' heatsinks to improve temperature control. The MC312 weighs just under 48kg.

French speaker company Focal has expanded its Kanta speaker line-up. Following the launch of the Kanta No 2 speaker in 2017, it has now added the bookshelf/standmount No 1 ②, designed for rooms of up to 25 sq m and selling for £4499 a pair, and the £8999/pr Kanta No 3, described as the 'gold standard' of the range, and aimed at larger rooms of up to 80 sq m. There's also a Kanta Centre speaker, selling for £1999 and designed for use in multichannel systems.

All the speakers use a range of proprietary Focal technologies, including drivers with flax cones and TMD (Tuned Mass Damper) suspension, the IAL 3 Beryllium tweeter



combining the IAL (Infinite Acoustic Loading) and IHL (Infinite Horn Loading), and an NIC (Neutral Inductance Circuit) motor designed to maintain performance across a wide range of operating conditions. The Kanta speakers come in a range of colours.

Focal has also announced its latest headphones, the £799 Elegia ③. This is the company's first high-end closed-back design, following the earlier launch of the open-backed Elear, Utopia and Clear models, and uses in-house technologies such as the lightweight driver with an 'M'-shaped aluminium/magnesium dome and a lightweight/high-power 4mm voice coil. Venting is used to balance the bass and mid-range, and low impedance is designed to make the headphones more compatible with portable players. Elegia comes with detachable braided cables and a carrying case.

Following on from the excellent Marantz ND8006 CD/network player, the company has now added the NA6006 ④ to its successful 6006 range of CD player and amplifier. The new model is a network device with no CD drive, but it sells for a little over half the price of the 8006 model,

at £549. Like the pricier machine, it draws on the development of the company's flagship SA-10, and can play music over a home network – via Wi-Fi or Ethernet – or from USB storage devices at up to 192kHz/24-bit FLAC, WAV and Apple Lossless, as well as DSD2.8/5.6MHz. It can also access a wide range of streaming services, including internet radio, Spotify Connect, Pandora, SiriusXM, Amazon Music, Tidal, Deezer and more.

Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay 2 wireless capability allows direct streaming from portable devices and computers, while the NA6006 also has HEOS built in, enabling it to become part of a whole-house multiroom music system, controlled from a smartphone or tablet app, or using Amazon Alexa voice control.

The NA6006 uses Marantz HDAM (Hyper-Dynamic Amplifier Module) technology, audiophile ESS 9016 Sabre digital-to-analogue conversion, dual crystal clock and Marantz Musical Digital Filtering (derived from the flagship SA-10 player and with two selectable filter settings).

Finally, turntable manufacturer Pro-Ject has marked the 50th anniversary of the release of The Beatles' *White Album* with a limited edition of its 2Xperience SB model ⑤. Not only is the plinth finished with the album's all-white artwork, but also the turntable comes with a white version of the 9-inch EVO tonearm, an exclusive white Ortofon 2M moving magnet cartridge, and a white record clamp. Available in a limited edition of 500 units, the turntable is £1299. **G**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Denon 800NE Series

With its latest launch, Denon reinforces its position in the affordable audio arena

The 800NE series may not quite be Denon's entry-level offering (that role being taken by the even more affordable 520AE range), but the new arrivals are pitched into the important under-£500 market, and are designed to hit that sweet spot between competitive pricing and enhanced performance.

Three models make up the range, with the DCD-800NE CD player at £349, and the PMA-800NE amplifier and DNP-800NE network player at £449 apiece. Put them together and you could have a rather attractive multisource system for just under £1250 plus speakers. Add on one of the excellent pairs of budget speakers currently available, and you're still only at around £1500 – for a set-up potentially capable of outperforming just about any packaged audio set-up this side of the luxury market, and with touches designed to add user-appeal: the DCD-800NE is rather more than the CD player it seems at first glance, thanks to the addition of a USB Type A port, to which thumb drives and other USB storage devices can be connected.

That seemingly small addition means the player can go beyond simply spinning discs, which can by the way be standard CDs, or CD-R/RW recordable media containing CD-resolution files, or compressed MP3 or WMA data: using the USB port, the Denon can also play high-resolution PCM files to 192kHz/24 bit as well as DSD64/2.8MHz and DSD128/5.6MHz. It does that using a combination of 192kHz/32-bit digital-to-analogue conversion, a master clock designed to minimise jitter by placing it right next to the DAC, and Denon's Advanced AL32

DENON DCD-800NE

Type CD player

Price £349

Plays CD, CD-R/RW, MP3, WMA from disc; PCM to 192kHz/24 bit and DSD64/128 from USB via front-panel socket

Audio outputs Line out on RCAs, optical/electrical digital

Accessories supplied Cables, remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.4x10.7x27.5cm



DENON DNP-800NE

Type Network music player

Price £449

Plays PCM to 192kHz/24 bit and DSD64/128 via network and front-panel USB socket

Streaming services Internet radio, Deezer, Spotify, Tidal and others

Wireless streaming AirPlay 2, Bluetooth

Networking Wi-Fi, Ethernet, HEOS multiroom

Outputs Fixed/variable analogue on RCAs, optical digital, headphones

Accessories supplied Wireless antennae, cables, remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.4x10.7x31.2cm

DENON PMA-800NE

Type Integrated amplifier

Price £449

Output power 85Wpc into 4 ohms, 50Wpc into 8 ohms

Inputs MM/MC phono, four line, 3 optical/1 coaxial digital

Outputs Two sets of speakers, line out, headphones

Tone controls Yes, with bypass

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.4x12.2x30.7cm
denon.co.uk

Processing Plus, the latest version of a long-established technology designed to create a more analogue waveform from digital formats. It works by using data interpolation algorithms to insert extra data points to smooth the output waveform after conversion.

Other elements of the design include Denon's Mechanical Ground Construction, part of an anti-vibration strategy including mounting the power transformers low

down, right above the insulating feet, as a further damping element.

The same design thinking informs the DNP-800NE network music player, which shares many of the elements of the CD player, including the design of the digital section, to power its task of doing for streamed content what the DVD-800NE does for discs. It can stream music from network storage in PCM-based formats up to 192kHz/24 bit and DSD128,

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Denons form a complete 'just add speakers' system - here are some suggested speakers

WHARFEDALE D310

Wharfedale's little D310s, also tested this issue, are a budget choice with a more mature sound than might be expected



BOWERS & WILKINS 607

Another small speaker but with a very grown-up sound, the Bowers & Wilkins 607s work well with the Denon system



and also has Bluetooth and AirPlay for wireless streaming from portable devices and computers, plus a front-panel USB Type A socket to which storage devices can be connected. It will stream a wide variety of online services, from TuneIn through to Spotify, Deezer, Amazon Music, SoundCloud, Tidal, Pandora and more, and connects to the home network using either Wi-Fi or wired Ethernet, with the latter preferable for stability when streaming, and obligatory if you're going to venture beyond 96kHz/24 bit or into the realms of DSD.

Outputs are provided on both fixed and variable level RCA sockets, this being a better solution in audio terms than having a single set of outputs switchable between the two operating modes. This provision allows the Denon to be used as a conventional source into an amplifier – such as the PMA-800NE, or straight into a power amplifier or active speakers.

The front-panel headphone socket has its own volume control and, like all the 800NE series products, the network player has remote control connectivity to allow all the components to be operated by one handset. Or, indeed, by a tablet or smartphone running the HEOS apps, as the DNP-800NE incorporates the HEOS multiroom system, allowing it to be combined with other HEOS products to create multiroom audio systems: as well as the HEOS-branded range of wireless speakers and other products, this HEOS capability is being extended throughout the range of Denon parent company Sound United, including the Marantz range.

Speaking of HEOS, this inclusion also allows the DNP-800NE – and the other products in the series – to be voice-controlled using an Amazon Alexa device, thanks to the 'HEOS Home Entertainment Skill' for the Alexa system. So you can tell the player what you want to hear – and in a complete HEOS multiroom system, where in the network you want to hear it – and with a fair following wind the music will flow forth.

The matching PMA-800NE is about as close as you can get to a do-it-all amplifier at this level of the market, having not just three line analogue inputs but also a phono stage switchable for moving magnet and moving coil cartridges. It also has three

optical digital inputs and one coaxial feeding 192kHz/24bit conversion, with an 'analogue mode' button to switch off the digital section for the ultimate signal purity when it's not in use. Two sets of speaker outputs are provided, with separate switching, and there are also tone controls, bypassable with a 'source direct' button, plus a headphone socket.

Delivering 85W per channel into 4ohms, the amplifier is built around Denon's proprietary wide-bandwidth Advanced High Current (AHC) single push-pull circuit power amplifier design, and draws on the design elements seen in the other 800NE models, notably the company's vibration-damping Direct Mechanical Ground Construction. Like the other products in the trio, it has a feeling of quality about it, with controls operating smoothly and precisely, and no hints anywhere of corners being cut.

PERFORMANCE

Connected together – I used analogue connections from the players to the amplifier, after ascertaining that the onboard conversion of the DCD-800NE and DNP-800NE gave better clarity and a little more weight than that built into the amplifier – and with the Denon system remote cables hooked up, the three products here operate seamlessly together, and produce a sound more than able to please those looking for a cost-effective set-up.

Yes, there's a little lightness to the bass, and pricier source components in particular will extract even more detail from favourite recordings, but whether used with inexpensive small speakers like the Wharfedale D310s or the more demanding Neat Iota Xplorer floorstanders, the Denons will never make the listener feel short-changed, which is exactly what one would hope for in components at this level.

Of course comparisons with stablemate Marantz are all but inevitable, and while the 800NE trio lacks a little of the warmth of, say, that company's 6006 series, it more than makes up for that with a crisply detailed view of the music that really holds the attention, whether with solo or small ensemble recordings, or the challenges of a big orchestral work in DSD128.

Or you could try ...

There's less competition at this price level than once there was, but the Denon 800NE system isn't without rivals.

Marantz CD6006 and PM6006

For example, stablemate Marantz offers its 6006 series of CD6006 disc player and PM6006 amplifier, working together with the newly added NA6006 network player to create a sound with generous warmth and fine soundstaging, plus a persuasive way with voices and instruments. See more at marantz.co.uk



Denon DRA-100 and DCD-100

For an alternative take, you need look no further than Denon's own range, and its sleek Design Series: the DRA-100 is a compact network receiver, yet still delivers 70Wpc. As well as network music streaming and both AirPlay and Bluetooth wireless connectivity has optical and coaxial digital inputs for external sources, to which you could add the company's matching slot-loading DCD-100 CD player. For more information, see denon.co.uk



Arcam HDA CDS50 and SA10

Arcam's spin on all this comes in the form of the new HDA range, which has both the CDS50 and the SA10 amplifier. The player is more than just a CD machine, also playing SACDs and being capable of streaming high-resolution music from network storage, while controlling it via the Arcam Music Life app adds streaming services including Qobuz and Tidal. With all that going on in the player, it's no surprise that the matching SA10 is a relatively simple device, with a 50Wpc output, analogue and digital inputs and a smooth, easygoing sound. Read more at arcam.co.uk



This is hi-fi with value for money writ large all over it: a fine-sounding, well-built and comprehensively equipped system formed from three strong components, and well worth some very serious auditioning. **G**

● REVIEW WHARFEDALE D310

Want good, affordable speakers? Look no further. With compact dimensions and a very attractive price, the new entry-level model from this famous British name looks like a fine buy. But there's more to it than that ...

When it comes to cost-conscious loudspeakers, Wharfedale has what the grizzled policemen in popular dramas call 'previous': for many years, going all the way back to the original Diamond, the company has made models that not only fit the pockets of newcomers to hi-fi, but also offer surprising levels of performance for the money.

That first Diamond, launched in 1981 and named for the company's 50th anniversary the following year, was a very compact speaker, its rear-ported cabinet just 24cm tall and with its drive units simply fixed to the front baffle. Selling for just £65 a pair, it kicked off an 'arms race' between a number of British manufacturers, with each trying to better the others with products offering ever more for the money.

These days the Diamond speakers have become rather refined, using superbly finished cabinets with curved sides for rigidity and the scattering of internal standing waves, and the slot-loaded downward-venting 'distributed port' first seen in the Diamond 100 series some six years back.

So where does the new D300 series fit in? Well, it starts with the D310 we have here, at the same price (£159/pr) as the Diamond 11.0, and is designed to advance the technology of the budget speaker range while adopting some more cost-effective engineering. The range has been simplified, too: above the D310 is just the larger D320 at £199/pr, the £499/pr D330 floorstanders and the D300C centre channel at £179.

Despite the 'D' in the model designation, Wharfedale Director of Acoustic Design Peter Comeau makes it clear this isn't a new Diamond range, but runs alongside the existing 11 series. Oh, and if you think the styling looks a little familiar, with its radiused corners between the cabinet panels, it's the work of industrial designer Kieron Dunk, who has also worked with Q Acoustics as well as Wharfedale stablemates Quad and Mission.

Standing just 26.5cm tall, the D310s pack a lot into their diminutive frames. The 10cm mid/bass driver uses the company's woven Kevlar cone, here mounted in an open basket to reduce reflections to the



WHARFEDALE D310

Type Two-way standmount/bookshelf speaker

Drive units 25mm soft dome tweeter, 10cm Kevlar-cone mid/bass with downward-venting P-EQ port

Sensitivity 86dB/W/m

Impedance '8ohm compatible'

Recommended amplifier power 20-75W

Frequency response 65Hz-20kHz

Dimensions (HxWxD) 26.5x15.5x20cm

wharfedale.co.uk

well on stands or bookshelves, while the choice of finishes – black, white, walnut or rosewood – should make it simple to match with almost any home decor.

Neither will you have any problems partnering these speakers: with 86db/W/m sensitivity and '8ohm compatible' nominal impedance, they're designed to work well with amplifiers of 20-75W, which made them a good match for the Denon PMA-800E amplifier also reviewed this month, and will also suit many of the affordable models on the market.

Combining a sweet, clean treble with an even balance across a relatively wide listening area, and with surprisingly forceful, but tightly controlled bass for cabinets so small, the D310s do more than sound big enough to fill most modestly sized rooms with very enjoyable sound. They also have rather good focus and soundstaging with a little adjustment of their positioning, creating a presentation that's truly stereo rather than simply two-channel.

True, the little Wharfedales are never going to challenge heftier floorstanding speakers, and are outperformed by the similarly – but not quite as – compact Bowers & Wilkins 607s reviewed last month. However, remember that the D310s sell for just under 40 per cent of the tag on those speakers, and if you want more bass extension you're probably best referred to the larger models in the Wharfedale range – after all, the floorstanding D330 model is still extremely keenly priced.

No, what the little D310s do is deliver music to a standard way beyond their compact dimensions and affordable price, and did so whether I tried them with the Denon components reviewed elsewhere in these pages, or – rather hilariously – with my Naim reference system on the front of them, which is around two orders of magnitude more expensive than the speakers it was driving.

I wouldn't suggest for a moment that NDS/555PS/Supernait 2/HiCap DR is the kind of system you need to buy to hear these speakers at their best; rather what they do is deliver an honest, workmanlike sound that's both well-balanced and involving, whatever style of music you play, and do so with a wide range of partnering equipment. For £159 a pair you can't ask for much more than that. 

rear and with a network of ribs for rigidity. The motor uses a long-throw voice coil and oversized ceramic magnets, while the design of the pole piece and surround minimize distortion.

Tuning the bass is the company's P-EQ (Pressure Equalisation) port system,

They deliver music to a standard way beyond their compact dimensions and affordable price

developed from the Diamonds' slot-loaded design: this vents downwards into the space formed by the feet on which the speaker stands, and aims to eliminate port effects by creating the same pressure inside the cabinet as outside in the room.

Like the woofer, the tweeter here has exposed fixings, and is a 25mm soft-dome Wide Frequency Response design, mounted in a dished waveguide to the front to improve dispersion, and with its own sub-cabinet behind – to isolate it from the woofer – into which the motor system also vents.

PERFORMANCE

The combination of the compact enclosure and that downward-venting port makes the D310 very easy to place: it will work

ESSAY

The perfect hi-fi show venue?

Organisers of audio exhibitions have long turned to hotels for venues, but is the industry now thinking inside the box?

Having been to a lot of exhibitions in my time, from motor shows and consumer electronics extravaganzas to craft fairs and open-air events, I keep coming back to the realisation that hi-fi shows present a particular challenge. Put simply, to sell hi-fi, you need to allow people to listen to it – and that's something you can't do on the open floor of a massive exhibition space.

Well you can, but it's very costly, as I witnessed some years back when Naim Audio marked its collaboration with Bentley Motors with a listening suite at the Geneva Motor Show. That room was attached to the VIP lounge at the back of a vast expanse of polished wood on which sat the gleaming fruits of the car-maker's labours, and a few of us were taken out to the show to experience it. We left having experienced something special, but convinced it was a one-off, and that the hi-fi industry alone could never do something like that.

Hotels weren't built for hi-fi shows, and that's as evident as it is obvious

That's almost the case – apart from the time Linn built a log cabin in the middle of Earl's Court as part of one of those short-lived Live! shows many years ago: after the event, the whole thing was taken down and ended up in a forest in Japan, where it's now the home of an eminent hi-fi consultant!

Others have tried converting shipping containers into listening rooms and parking them on show floors – in the days before those big metal boxes were repurposed into everything from pop-up restaurants to emergency housing – but in general the compromise has been to let the non-audio exhibits have the big floorspace, and find some suitable closed rooms for the specialist hi-fi companies.

It seems to work well for the High End Show in Munich, where open floor space combines with showrooms arranged around glass atria, while – in the days when audio was a major part of its offering – CES in Las Vegas filled floors of hotels with high-end audio demonstrations, leaving

the vast floors of the convention centre to the huge stands of the LGs, Samsungs and Sonys.

Problem is, every time we in the UK scratch our heads and think 'Where is there here that's like the MOC in Munich?' we come up short, and so the default fall-back is the hotel show, which has served the hi-fi industry for many years.

You can see the appeal – lots of companies in one place, enabling visitors to go from room to room – but hotels weren't built for hi-fi shows, and that's as evident as it is obvious. Corridors that are fine when allowing guests to access their rooms 51 weeks of the year are too narrow when thronged with showgoers and clogged with the inevitable conversations springing up outside the 'demonstration rooms'; lifts get overwhelmed by the crowds, let alone the nightmare of the exhibitors' get-in and get-out before and after the show, and unless the show organiser bites the bullet and leaves every other room empty, noise pollution between adjacent demonstrations is more than a nuisance.

And the rooms themselves? Not ideal: the average hotel room has a relatively narrow entrance from its door past its bathroom before opening out, which clogs as showgoers try to enter and exit at the same time, and many rooms have quite a lot of fixtures one can't remove even once you've shifted the beds out. It's hardly conducive to showing off your hi-fi wares at their best, is it?

Fortunately, it seems there may be a solution, for just as everyone from the world's rock bands to the most successful stand-up comedians have discovered that sports stadiums offer a good way to entertain the masses, so it seems these large-scale venues may offer a solution for audio show organisers.

Or rather the huge numbers of private boxes way up in the terraces, the symbols of the big money in sport's corporate side, may be the answer. I'm writing this having just got back from the Audio Video Show in Warsaw, which does still use a couple of city-centre hotels, but also dozens of corporate boxes and TV studios in the mid-levels of the country's National Stadium. And it works: the rooms are of a decent range of sizes and (with judicious use of acoustic treatment panels and some skill in



Hi-fi show exhibition spaces come in all shapes and sizes, with varying degrees of success

setting up the hi-fi systems) seem to allow a pretty reasonable sound.

The corridors behind the boxes, designed to handle many visitors, are wide – sufficient for some stand-type exhibits for the passing trade – and of course transport links, parking, access and catering are all a given for a major sporting venue. If it can handle tens of thousands of football fans all arriving at once, a few thousand hi-fi show attendees spread over a weekend should prove no problem at all. The Warsaw show had a continuous shuttle bus service between the stadium and the hotels holding exhibits, everyone seemed happy, and the visiting experience was considerably less fraught than usual.

Interestingly, one of the British shows (organised by another magazine for which I write) is moving to the uncharted territory of the grandstand at Ascot racecourse. With 300 meeting rooms, good transport links and easy parking it could just be the place the UK hi-fi show reinvents itself as a place we'd all like to be – somewhere to relax and enjoy the music. If you're interested in hi-fi, and want to discover the latest trends, you could find it's about to become a more pleasant experience. **G**

Johan Dalene,
2017 First Prize.

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NOTES & LETTERS

Rossini's chamber music • Szell remembered • Copland's London appearances

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Rossini's string sonatas

After reading Richard Osborne's excellent and informative survey of the appreciation of Rossini's operas, sacred and instrumental works (December, page 14), an unmentioned gem flashed into my mind – the six string sonatas. They have been a regular favourite with music-lovers since the earliest days of LP, especially the Philips recording featuring the mellifluous playing of the original quartet version by Salvatore Accardo and friends [4/81], and a highly cultured performance of an adaption prepared for string ensemble by the ASMF under the guidance of the late Sir Neville Marriner [Argo, 5/67 and 12/69].

To one's astonishment, these instantly appealing works were written within a mere three days when Rossini was just 12 years old. The ever-witty composer remarked the premieres were played in 'a doggish way'. Whether Rossini was simply being humble or stating the truth, these sonatas must have been warmly received: adaptations in other forms soon appeared and have been performed until this very day.

Pleasing as they are to the ears, they demand utmost precision, refined virtuosity and fluent melodic lines from the performers: the composer in his early teens was already the embodiment of the spirit of *bel canto*. However flawed they might be, as musicologists may not hesitate to point out, these delightful works will never fail to give pleasure to the audiences, and I believe, win the composer more friends.
Wei-Chin Chen, via email

Szell's Slavonic Dances

Richard Osborne, in his review of Sony Classical's 106-CD set of George Szell's CBS recordings (November 2018, page 104), speaks of the '1965 disc of Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*' by Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra, and I have seen this date given in other sources. However, I bought the Szell/Cleveland *Slavonic Dances* on a Fontana Masters of Art LP in, I am sure, 1962. Two of the dances were omitted by Fontana and, as I traced some years later when I bought a full set of the Szell recordings, some of the dances in the Fontana issue had suffered cuts of, for example, section repeats. I was convinced, however, that the dances issued by Fontana before 1962 were the same

Letter of the Month



Copland's music has found the perfect champions in John Wilson and the BBC Philharmonic

Copland in the UK

As a schoolboy living in Chiswick, I was a frequent visitor to the Royal Festival Hall, where I gained so much of my musical education. At that very impressionable age I took every opportunity to see Aaron Copland conduct his own works with the London Symphony Orchestra, including *Music for a Great City*. Oddly enough, I heard more of his music during my pre-undergraduate years here than I did when I lived in the United States.

Having lived with Copland's music all my life, I have a special affection for it, so what a delight it has been to hear the Chandos recordings of Copland's music from John Wilson

and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. My expectations were particularly high for the fourth volume (reviewed in December, page 59), which centred on the Third Symphony (coupled with the much-neglected *Connotations*) and what a magnificent set of performances that has turned out to be! A meticulously detailed reading from John Wilson of the uncut Symphony, magnificently performed by the orchestra, matched by a beautifully balanced crystal-clear recording from Chandos make this entire recording a sheer joy. Clear evidence that, in the right sympathetic hands, it isn't necessary to make uncalled-for cuts. Thankfully, there's more to come!

*John WG Smith
London SE1*

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recordings of the *Slavonic Dances* that were later said to have been recorded in 1965, not earlier recordings.

*Paul Brownsey
Glasgow*

Richard Osborne writes: I can understand your confusion, given that Szell made so many recordings of the Dvořák *Slavonic Dances* between 1947 and 1965. For example, I hadn't realised, before the release of the new box-set, that the 1965 LP had been made bit by bit in Severance Hall during the years 1962-65.

As for the Fontana Masters of Art reissue (EFL2515), these recordings were made in Cleveland's Masonic Auditorium in 1956, partly released in the UK on Philips (enthusiastically reviewed by Malcolm Macdonald, 9/57) and finally released, the full set, on Fontana (10/61) where WA Chislett sorted it all out and was equally enthusiastic. It was clearly an excellent purchase in 1962 and probably didn't need replacing unless stereo sound was an issue.

I haven't had time to do side-by-side comparisons of the competing sets as to

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text and performance, though the readings themselves were remarkably consistent over the years.

Szell's greatness

Two polar opposite views expressed about the conductor George Szell in December's *Gramophone*. The letter of Keith Pearce (page 156) picks up on criticism of Szell that has always been around concerning his character which is then superimposed on his recorded performances: 'deficiency of warmth and humanity', 'cold and analytical' and so on. There is a significant improvement in the sound quality of the newly remastered performances which give a much greater sense of depth and space.

Actually I read the words of Pierre Monteux – quoted in Pearce's letter – as affirming of Szell, and comments made by most members of the Cleveland Orchestra said Szell made them play better and, under his baton, they *wanted* to play better.

I only got to know the performances of George Szell through the BBC in the late 1970s while I was at college. These were recordings of him in live performance from Cleveland's Severance Hall in the last few years of his life. While I would not go as far as Jed Distler in his Critics' Choice pick (page 41) in saying Szell 'was the greatest 20th-century conductor' he certainly belongs right up there in that exalted echelon.

I now have many of those concert recordings, which can be accessed as well on YouTube, and there are a number of performances which for me have never been surpassed. I include Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony from his last concert in Cleveland in May 1970 and the Schubert Great C major around the same date. From his last season I would include Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen* and, from 1968, a Verdi Requiem which is stunning!

It is a shame that for copyright reasons and 'tape wiping' many of Szell's live concerts are not available to supplement what in the end is a remarkable discography which Sony Classical has at last done justice to.

*Rev Ian Harper
London*

John McCabe and Continuum

I am grateful that you managed to find room for an obituary (December, page 157) of the vividly enthusiastic and energetic Murray Khouri, the clarinettist and founder of Continuum Records. May I correct your obituary in one small instance? My husband, John McCabe, did indeed make a number of albums for the Continuum label. Among these he recorded a CD of Bax's solo piano music, including the Sonata in E flat. He also recorded, with Murray Khouri, the Brahms Clarinet Sonatas, Op 120, Nos 1 and 2, together with the Clarinet Sonata, Op 84, by Hans Gál. He did not, however, record the Bax Clarinet Sonata. The pianist for that work was Peter Pettinger.

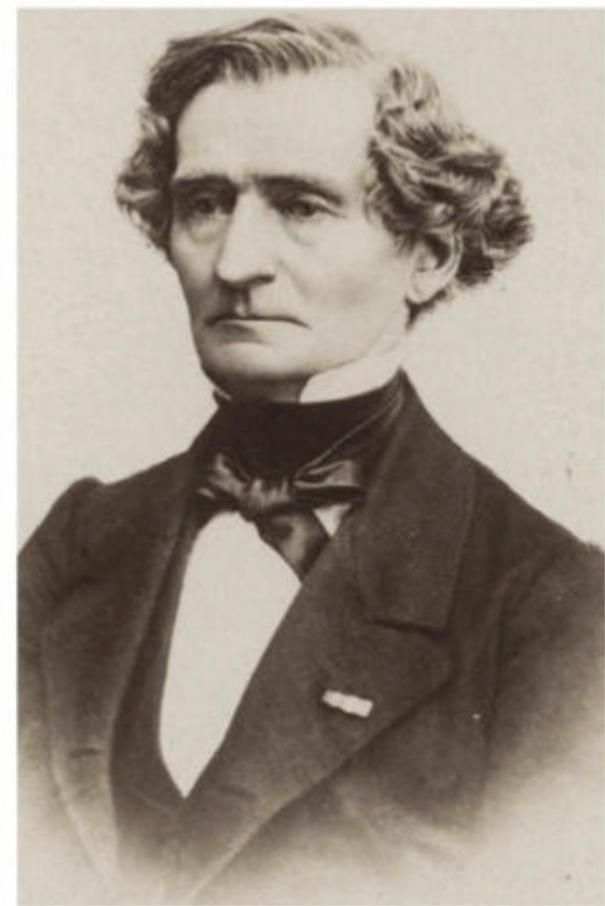
Monica McCabe, via email

Larrocha and Iberia

Bryce Morrison, in his review of Alicia de Larrocha's Decca recordings (November, page 107), errs in claiming that she recorded Albéniz's *Iberia* three times. There are actually four distinct Larrocha versions of this work. The first is a 1958 mono set for Hispavox, also briefly issued by American Columbia. This was followed by her 1962 Hispavox stereo remake and by her two familiar later versions for Decca.

*Donald Manildi
Curator, International Piano Archives at Maryland, University of Maryland, USA*

NEXT MONTH FEBRUARY 2018



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OBITUARIES

An authority on jazz for *Gramophone* and *Jazz Journal*

ALUN MORGAN

Jazz critic and writer
Born February 24, 1928
Died November 11, 2018



Alun Morgan, who reviewed jazz for *Gramophone*, has died at the age of 90. While maintaining a career as an architect, Morgan wrote about jazz from his student days when his name

started appearing in *Melody Maker*. His erudite, passionate and clear-headed writing informed between 2500 and 3000 LP sleeve-notes and he brought similar qualities to his reviews and contributions to the BBC's jazz programmes and to *Jazz Journal*. Among his books are *Modern Jazz: A Survey of Developments since 1939*, written with Raymond Horrocks (1956), as a contributor to *Jazz On Record – A Critical Guide* (1968 onwards), and a biography of Count Basie.

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Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Only the second woman to be appointed to the US Supreme Court, the liberal icon, 85, discusses opera, equality in music, and her eponymous CD

It all started with Dean Dixon, a conductor who was on a mission to turn children on to classical music and took mini operas to all the schools in New York City. I grew up in Brooklyn and when I was 11 my teacher took me to a high school where they were putting on an abbreviated version of Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*. I'd played the piano since I was eight years old, and in ninth grade I'd taken up the cello, but opera was new to me. And I'd never seen anything like it – the glorious music, the drama! This was in 1944. Five years later Dixon left the US, saying: 'In all the time I've been conducting here, no one has ever called me "Maestro".' And that was because he was an African-American. He went to Europe and had a flourishing career, and when he returned to the US, every major orchestra wanted him. It's a good illustration of how US society had changed over those years.

So I started to go to the opera. When my late husband was stationed in Oklahoma, the Met toured to Dallas, Texas, and I saw Zinka Milanov, my first Tosca. And when we were in Harvard, we'd see the Met when it came to Boston; I recall a *Butterfly* with the soprano Antonietta Stella – it was directed by a Japanese director, and Stella moved like a Japanese woman.

When we moved to New York, we got a subscription to the Met, and we kept it going when the Company moved to Lincoln Center. There was a marvellous production of Barber's *Anthony and Cleopatra* in 1966, and the stage design meant that anything that could go wrong *did* go wrong. Meanwhile, across the way in the State Theater was a smaller production by New York City Opera of Handel's *Julius Caesar* with Beverly Sills as Cleopatra and Norman Treigle as Caesar. It was magical. I loved Sills. For a long time she sang at City Opera – it was only much later that she finally sang at the Met.

In my younger days, I never saw an opera where an orchestra had female players. Then someone had the bright idea to drop a curtain between those auditioning and the panel, and things changed overnight. I wish we could have a drop curtain in every field of human endeavour.

And now we're seeing female opera directors, too. I moved to DC in 1980 and over the years I've watched the Washington National Opera get better and better. Francesca Zambello, the artistic director, is tremendous, and they have a very good Young Artist Program; I took my Chambers staff to its annual showcase, a performance of *La traviata*, in October.

I live next door to Kennedy Center so I like going to recitals there as well as opera (even though I try not to go out when Court is in session – sometimes I'll bring my law books with me). It's a chance to pause, to just enjoy the music. There was a recital recently by the bass-baritone Ryan Speedo Green, who had a book, *Sing for Your Life*, written about him.



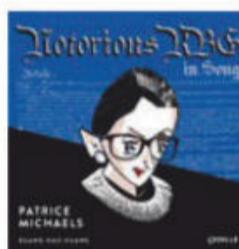
THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

'Notorious RBG in Song'

Patrice Michaels sop Kuang-Hao Huang pf Cedille
The CD is based on my own life, but it's a family affair. My daughter-in-law wrote the song-cycle and performs the whole disc, and my son produced it.

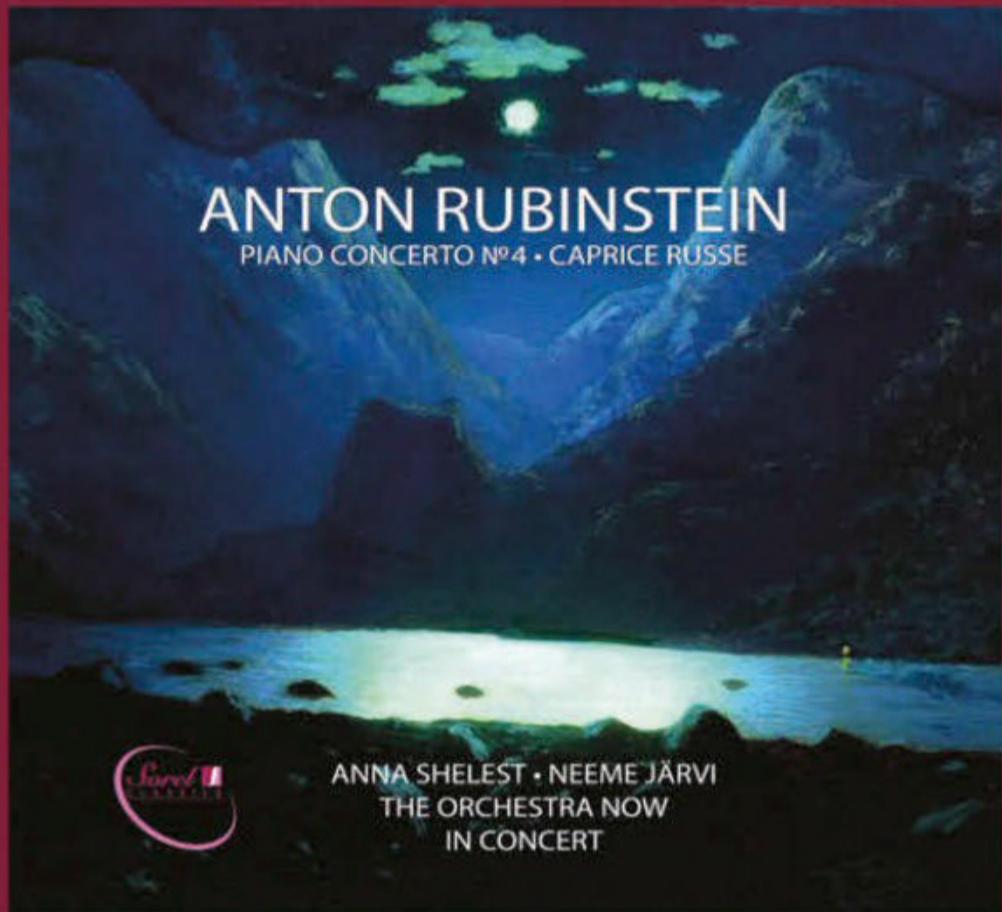
He lived in a poor neighbourhood, had a dysfunctional family and got into trouble at school, but a teacher took him to the Met to see Denyce Graves in *Carmen* and he said: 'I'm going to sing there one day.' He ended up winning the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2011. I tried to get him to give a concert at Court, but he was under contract with the Vienna State Opera at the time and couldn't be released.

The 'Notorious RBG in Song' CD started with 'Anita's Story'. Anita was my husband's secretary and a few years ago I found a letter she wrote to me about how she became a feminist through typing up my briefs; my son and daughter commissioned songs from three female composers for my 80th birthday, and this was used for one of them, set by my wonderful daughter-in-law, the soprano Patrice Michaels. Then Patrice composed a whole song-cycle around it, and *The Long View* is the result. Stacy Garrop was another of the female composers who was approached for my 80th; after my husband died, I found in a drawer a most beautiful love letter he had written and this is what Stacy based her song on. It was essential that we include this on the recording – he was so important in my life and in the lives of our children. **G**
The film 'RBG' is in UK cinemas from January 4 (rbgmovie.co.uk)





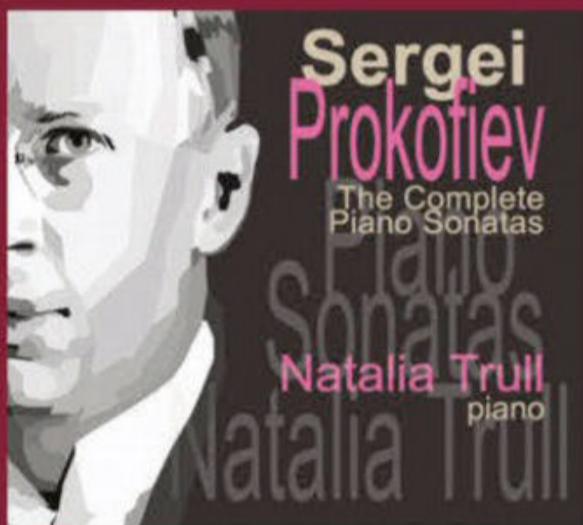
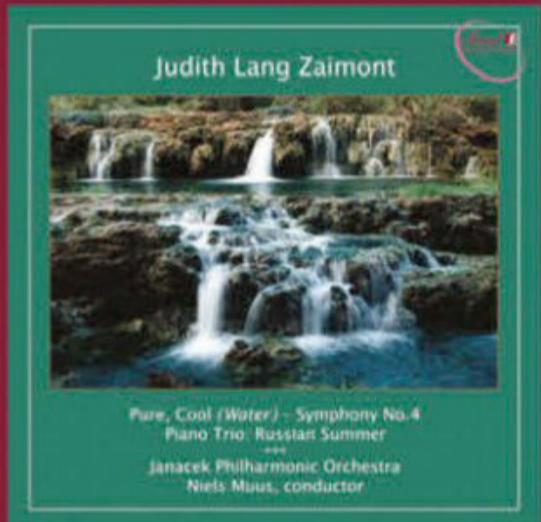
Expanding opportunities for women in music



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